



Australian Pain Society

# 2022 DISTINGUISHED MEMBER AWARD

---

Awarded for services to the promotion,  
treatment and science of pain  
management and lifelong contribution  
to the Australian Pain Society.

---





## Dr Michael Farrell

BAppSci (Physio), MSc, PhD

Dr Michael Farrell is a most worthy recipient of the Australian Pain Society's (APS) Distinguished Member Award. Many members and other individuals associated with the APS will remember Michael from his long-standing and outstanding contributions to the Scientific Program Committee, where he served as Chair from 2009 to 2014. Michael was the driving force behind many successful APS scientific meetings during this time. He had great ability to identify new developments in pain research and invite esteemed international researchers (who rarely declined an invitation), resulting in numerous engaging plenary and topical sessions. Michael's outstanding people skills ensured that the Scientific Program Committee meetings were reflective of the collegiate and multidisciplinary nature of the APS.

Michael's commitment to the APS extends well beyond his role on the Scientific Program Committee. He co-authored the 2005 edition of the APS *Pain in Residential Aged Care Facilities* book, as well as the Waiting in Pain 2012 report (the draft interim report that was vital to the National Pain Summit in March 2010) and the Waiting in Pain II report in 2020. Following the completion of his term on the Scientific Program Committee, Michael took over as Chair of the Scholarships Committee in 2014, a role he continues in to this day. In

this role, he liaises with the APS Secretariat to advertise PhD scholarships widely throughout Australia, chairs the APS PhD Scholarship selection committee, and maintains strong and supportive relationships with the PhD Scholars during the course of their projects to ensure all is progressing well. Michael is passionate about mentoring and supporting early career researchers and clinicians. He was instrumental in promoting the revision of the APS Travel Grant program to the APS Board in 2012, ensuring a dedicated allocation of APS operating funds to cover PhD students first, then nurses, allied health professionals, and other post-graduate students if funds permit. He also served as Vice President of the Australian Pain Relief Association from 2017 through to 2021.

Michael commenced his career in the pain world as a physiotherapist and worked clinically before commencing research in the area of pain in older persons. He was awarded his PhD from the University of Melbourne in 1999. As a recipient of a NHMRC Neil Hamilton Fairley Fellowship, Michael completed a postdoc in the lab of Richard Gracely at the National Institutes of Health before returning to Melbourne and joining the Howard Florey Institute in 2003. As the leader of the Interoception Imaging team at the Florey, Michael was also a C.R. Roper Fellow

at the University of Melbourne. He joined the Department of Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences at Monash University as an Associate Professor in 2014.

During the early stages of his research career Michael continued his work to understand pain in older persons and developed a strong collaboration with Professor Stephen Gibson, where they published numerous excellent papers at the National Ageing Research Institute. Michael developed strong expertise in functional brain imaging techniques including positron emission tomography, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and perfusion-fMRI, before using these skills to investigate how the brain controls sensations and regulatory responses that arise from internal body signals. His research made valuable contributions to the study of pain, but also extended to address diverse sensations including thirst, the urge-to-cough, sexual arousal, and temperature, as well as associated motor responses including swallowing control, coughing, and thermoregulation. Michael's expertise in brain imaging is highly sought after, and his collaborations with many research groups including those in arthritis, back pain, whiplash, and other musculoskeletal conditions is testimony to this expertise. More importantly, it speaks to Michael's enthusiasm

to share his wisdom and collaborate with many research groups. Michael's attention to detail and great patience in teaching those with less expertise in brain imaging is appreciated by many.

Michael has published over 150 scientific papers, with an h-index of 43. He has published in prestigious journals such as *Journal of Neuroscience*, *Human Brain Mapping*, *PAIN*, and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. He has delivered countless presentations at the APS Annual Scientific Meeting—where he was a national keynote speaker in 2019—and the IASP World Congress, which he has rarely missed. A recurring image from these conferences is Michael deep in conversation with a colleague discussing all things 'pain'.

The APS and the wider pain field have benefitted enormously from Michael's contributions. We greatly appreciate his commitment, enthusiasm, passion, understanding, and respect. Michael is thoroughly deserving of this award, and we are all richer for his contribution to the APS and pain research.