

Centers of Advanced Medicine

Center for Neuroscience of Pain

Fusao Kato, *Professor and Director*

General Summary

The Jikei Center for Neuroscience of Pain (JCNP) was established in April 2014 as the first member of the Core Centers for Advanced Medicine of The Jikei University. The JCNP was created to advance clinical and biomedical research in The Jikei University under the support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology–Supported Program for the Strategic Research Foundation at Private Universities (S1311009; FY2013–2018).

Pain is one of the most serious concerns in medicine. Besides being a beneficial alarm for on-going harmful events, such as the injury and inflammation, pain is not only a simple sensation but it is also inevitably “painful,” causes suffering, and is accompanied by strong negative emotions. Such emotional aspects of pain also cause patients to remember the potentially harmful situations. However, such an emotional aspect of pain also decreases quality of life, prevents concentration and rest, and leads to various mental disorders, including depression and anxiety. These changes often lead to various psychosomatic complications. Thus, identifying the neural mechanism underlying the emotional aspect of pain is an urgent issue to alleviate, control, and mitigate the patient’s suffering from a large variety of pain symptoms described in various parts of the body, such as the head, back, viscera, and even absent limbs. Recent advances in pain science have identified the networks of the brain as the nuclear mechanism responsible for such clinically “undesired” pain. In particular, chronic pain, which numerous patients have (>15% of the population in major countries), is now thought to be established through changes in the widely distributed neural networks underlying the sensory, cognitive, and affective dimensions of pain. The JCNP has been successful in integrating the activities of the diverse research teams in The Jikei University and other institutions to establish a basis for advances to be made in understanding, evaluating, and mitigating unnecessary pain.

Research Activities

The JCNP is composed of 3 research cores

1. Core for the brain mechanism of pain (core leader, Fusao Kato)

This core studies the brain plasticity mechanism underlying the establishment of chronic pain using neurophysiological, neuroanatomical, and neuropharmacological approaches with techniques from molecular biology, behavioral sciences, to optogenetics/pharmacogenetics. In addition, this core utilizes ultrahigh magnetic field magnetic resonance imaging for small animals at The Jikei University to visualize brain activity during the chronicification process of pain (in which pain changes from episodic to chronic) and to evaluate

the effects of various therapeutic interventions, such as the transcranial magnetic stimulation.

2. Core for the specific disease-associated pain (core leader, Toya Ohashi)

This core aims to identify mechanisms underlying aberrant specific pain accompanying specific types of diseases, such as Fabry disease, syringomyelia, poststroke pain, postherpes pain, fibromyalgia, and painful diabetic neuropathy. Taking advantage of The Jikei University Hospital, which is visited by many patients with these diseases, this core will use various approaches, including animal models of disease, primary cultured cells, and induced pluripotent stem cells derived from patients, and attempt to translate the findings in the animals to clinical applications.

3. Core for the pain in human patients (core leader, Shoichi Uezono)

This core deals with the pain of multiple causes frequently observed in patients. Such pain includes postoperative pain, cancer pain, and neuropathic pain, most of which are resistant to therapy and have unidentified mechanisms. Collaborations between divisions for biomedical sciences in other cores and clinical departments, such as anesthesiology (including the pain clinic), rehabilitation medicine, orthopedic surgery, neurology, and neurosurgery, are promoted in this core. The detailed clinical analyses of the sensory, cognitive, and affective dimensions of pain in relation to other clinical observations in each patient will be used to develop and examine novel strategies against therapy-resistant complications of chronic pain.

Close mutual interactions between these cores are promoted with the strong leadership of the directors and the Department of Neuroscience, where the headquarters of the JCNP are located. In addition, advanced experimental systems for pain evaluation and brain activity measurement are in the Department of Neuroscience and are now frequently used by many researchers belonging to the JCNP.