



Pain medicine stories by the ABC and The Age joint winners of ANZCA Media Award

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The ABC and The Age are the joint winners of the 2018 Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists' (ANZCA) Media Award.

The ABC's Alison Branley and Rebecca Armitage were recognised for their January 28, 2018 online and TV report "Pain and gain when products pulled from shelves" which examined the removal of codeine as an over-the-counter pain medicine.

"We wanted to make it clear to the Australian public why this change was so important to protect public health and used statistics to support this argument. We also wanted to illustrate that there are new approaches to pain management that incorporate a combination of treatments, that even the most cynical of patients have found to be effective. Overall this was a story that talked to both regular people affected by the change, policy makers and experts in the field," Ms Branley said.

Reporters Liam Mannix and Aisha Dow of The Age were also winners for their investigation into the drug Lyrica, one of Australia's most popular pharmaceutical drugs. The investigation led to two stories in November and December 2018 that revealed the drug was being overprescribed as an alternative to opioids for pain relief and highlighted personal case studies of people who had taken the drug.

"Our investigation - which took several months and involved well over 20 interviews and reading dozens of scientific papers - proved that it was addictive, open to abuse, linked to suicide, and that people were dying. And we showed evidence it might not work for conditions it was being prescribed for. There had been no coverage of the issue in the press at all before our reporting. We also revealed that it was being overprescribed, likely for things that it wouldn't help - and we revealed the systemic flaws in the system leading to overprescription," Mr Mannix said.

The \$5000 award, for the best news story or feature about anaesthesia or pain medicine, was judged by former ABC journalist, lecturer and media training expert Doug Weller, anaesthetist and ANZCA Bulletin Medical Editor Dr Nigel Robertson and Ambulance Victoria media director Tom Noble.

The judges said: "The winning entries demonstrated high quality, accurate journalism on real and serious topics that highlight two key public interest issues. Both entries shone a spotlight on the unintended consequences of best intentions in pain medicine and the importance of accurate and high level research in providing the best care to patients in Australia and New Zealand."