Four Decades Later: Revision of the IASP Definition of Pain and Notes

The currently accepted definition of pain was originally adopted in 1979 by the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP).

1979 Definition of Pain
An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage.

2020 Revised Definition of Pain
An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage.

2020 Revised Definition of Pain Notes
- Pain is always a personal experience that is influenced by varying degrees by biological, psychological, and social factors.
- Pain and nociception are different phenomena. Pain cannot be inferred solely from activity in sensory neurons.
- Through their life experiences, individuals learn the concept of pain.
- A person’s report of an experience as pain should be respected.
- Although pain usually serves an adaptive role, it may have adverse effects on function and social and psychological well-being.
- Verbal description is only one of several behaviors to express pain; inability to communicate does not negate the possibility that a human or a nonhuman animal experiences pain.

The revised IASP definition of pain: concepts, challenges, and compromises
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