

Improving care for back pain: Communication and psychologically informed treatment

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Musculoskeletal pain often results in various forms of avoidance behavior. The patient learns that certain movements or activities may (in the early acute phase) provoke pain and therefore more than 70% of patients report avoiding entirely or performing with great caution activities like exercise or household chores. In addition, patients with musculoskeletal pain can be a challenge to treat because they have a variety of co-morbid problems. It is common, for example, that a patient suffering pain also experiences considerable distress. Furthermore, the patient may have difficulties in sleeping as well as with a stressful life. In order to meet the patient's needs for successful treatment, we clinicians should understand the patient's entire story and the context for their suffering.

This presentation will focus on communication skills for developing a working relationship with the patient which allows for disclosures of important information about the problem and the context in which it occurs. Moreover, I will link this communication to the use of exposure techniques designed to reduce fear, apprehension, and avoidance behaviors. A central element is creating a working alliance with the patient that allows for meaningful exposure. Participants can expect to learn about effective communication strategies and techniques as well as basic techniques for conducting exposure therapy for avoidance of movements.