

Long-term management of chronic pain: Clients' and therapists' perspectives

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Introduction: Chronic pain has been estimated to affect up to 1/3 of the adult population in Western societies. The estimated health and burden of care costs are comparable to cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal conditions. Chronic pain management programs have existed for over 20 years, but how effective are they at providing long-term management for participants?

Objectives:

- Compare perspectives from participants of a pain management program and occupational therapists working in chronic pain practice, regarding factors that enable long-term pain management;
- Detail how engagement in meaningful occupations and routines is critical to the pain management process;
- critique current approaches to chronic pain management and discuss emergent methods of management.

Methods: Using purposive sampling, 15 past pain program participants and 9 occupational therapists working in the area of chronic pain were interviewed. The data (interviews) were collected between 2005-2007. Applying qualitative methods of narrative analysis, interviews were explored in-depth. The analysis of client and therapist interviews was interpretive and inductive, and identified themes common to both participants and therapists. Methodological and interpretive rigour was ensured through the use of participant checking and triangulation of analysis by experienced researchers.

Results: Themes identified that arose from the data included: 'being the right time', 'accepting the pain', 'using different ways', 'doing everyday things is important', and 'having ongoing support'. These will be discussed in reference to theoretical concepts of readiness for change, acceptance and occupation engagement and well-being. Additionally the suitability of current pain program behavioural methods (cognitive-behavioural therapy) will be critiqued from therapist and participant perspectives.

Conclusion: This research explored the congruence of occupational therapists' beliefs about chronic pain management with those of clients they see in chronic pain practice. It further critiqued the methods used in current chronic pain practice.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy:

- Provide evidence that occupational therapists are aware of what influences chronic pain management for their clients;
- Emphasise the importance of occupational therapists measuring both subjective and objective outcomes using latest chronic pain theories and practice methods;
- Value occupational engagement as critical to ongoing pain management.