

A Holistic Approach to Managing Chronic Pain

By Paula Sumner, FNP-BC

Many people have the unfortunate experience of living with chronic pain. Fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, and back pain are a few of the diagnoses that are associated with complaints of chronic pain.

Acute pain, like a burned finger from a hot stove, resolves within a few days; sudden onset back pain usually resolves with conservative treatment within two weeks or more. However, if the pain is somehow associated with a strong emotional trigger, that pain may become a chronic issue. The pain is real, and many learn to live their lives without being limited by that pain. Others, however, live very limited lives citing chronic pain as the reason for not living a full life.

Many holistic practitioners believe that when a person experiences an emotional, physical, or spiritual traumatic event, that event may manifest as a physical ailment such as chronic pain. The pain may be accompanied by depression, anxiety, fear, complaints of headaches, insomnia, stomach ulcers, hypertension, and exacerbation of irritable bowel symptoms among other maladies.

The person with chronic pain shops for relief—reaching for possible solutions from one source after another: pain medications, doctor shopping, physical therapy, chiropractic care, acupuncture, increased alcohol intake, and more until he or she becomes “disabled.” Sometimes relief is achieved, sometimes it is not. There are several traditional treatment approaches for chronic pain that many have tried without successful relief. The client may become angry at the pain, at the medical establishment, and, in some cases, at their God for not relieving their pain.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

A holistic approach not only looks at the physical experience of pain but also explores the possible emotional/psychological and spiritual triggers for pain.

I begin by conducting an in-depth history and formulating an approach that will benefit the client. Most importantly, I ask the client with chronic pain, “What will your life be like



when you have achieved control over your chronic pain?” This is an important question. The pain has occupied many hours of the client’s life; releasing it will create a void where the pain may take over again, or the patient can fill the void with positive thoughts, affirmations, and beneficial activities.

In my practice, the plan we develop may use different techniques alone or may integrate various techniques in helping the client manage the pain. Such techniques may include Healing Touch, Hypnotherapy, Energy Psychology, Energy Medicine, or Past Life Soul Regression Therapy (PLSRT). Other approaches may include Mindfulness Stress Reduction Therapy, Polarity Therapy or massage therapy. The goal is to place the pain in perspective, to release the emotional component surrounding the pain and allow the client to live a full life in control.

CASE 1: A 54 year-old woman came in with complaints of back pain for the last five years—starting with an accident where, when exiting on the passenger side of a friend’s car, she was hit by the open door when the car rolled backwards. Using an energy medicine approach through Healing Touch, I picked up the emotion of anger. I asked her about this and she began to cry. She had never

forgiven her friend for causing the accident and remained angry with her after five years. Together we were able to work on releasing her anger so that she was comfortable enough to continue in graduate school.

CASE 2: A 50-year-old woman also had experienced back pain for years. Performing a specific Rosen Method massage to elicit cellular memory release, the song See Me, Feel Me, Touch Me (The Who) came to mind. When asked if the song had any meaning for her she began to cry. She said she felt that no one saw her, touched her, or felt her pain. With further work she was able to release this emotion and lessen her pain.

TAKING CHARGE OF ONE’S PAIN

Self-care is possible. Quietly sit and examine the pain without judgment. What were the circumstances when the pain first occurred? What were you feeling emotionally? You may decide to journal about the pain: is there a benefit to having the pain or will there be a greater benefit in releasing it? This is not meant to be self-blame, perhaps there is more attention from loved ones or relief from an intolerable situation. Perhaps one will never know if there was a current life situation that may have contributed to the onset of pain, but exploring the possible sources of pain can be very helpful.

A person with chronic physical and emotional pain is a partner in the healing work. When ready, she may resume control and enjoyment of her life. Healing does not necessarily mean the absence of pain or disease, but becoming able to live fully despite any discomfort that will no longer have control over one’s life. **h&h**

Paula Sumner is a Family Nurse Practitioner with Carolina Partners in Mental HealthCare in Chapel Hill—401 Providence Road, Suite 100. She specializes in hypnotherapy, Healing Touch, and EFT tapping. For more information, or to schedule an initial evaluation, call at 919-929-9610 or visit www.carolinapartners.com.