Annotated Bibliography for Psychophysiologic Disorders and Chronic Pain

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Introduction

The PPD Association (PPDAAssociation.org) recommends evidence-based psychological techniques for diagnosis and treatment of (and relief from) persistent physical symptoms that are not caused by organ disease or structural abnormalities. We refer to this form of illness as Psychophysiologic Disorders (PPD) and the symptoms include chronic pain, medically unexplained symptoms, chronic functional syndromes and somatisation disorders. However, because a wide range of specialties has addressed these issues, the relevant science has been published in a very large number of journals making it a challenge to comprehensively review.

Consequently, few clinicians are aware of the quality and quantity of evidence supporting a psychological approach to PPD symptoms. This bibliography compiles the most relevant published research into a single document. The PPD Association welcomes recommendations for additions to the bibliography via emailing info@ppdassociation.org.

Immediately below is an index to the clinical and scientific dilemmas addressed by the research followed by an annotated bibliography listed alphabetically by first author. The PPDA hopes you find the evidence helpful in accounting for the excellent outcomes we observe in our clinical practice.

Index by Clinical/Scientific Issue

Evidence for the benefit of psychological treatment for persistent physical symptoms, particularly for Emotional Awareness & Expression Therapy and Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy with lesser effect size from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance & Commitment Therapy and Educational Techniques.

Evidence regarding the link between adverse life experiences (child or adult) and persistent physical symptoms.

Evidence that psychological factors can change pain perception.

Evidence that objective measures of organ disease or structural abnormality (such as imaging studies) are not good predictors of persistent symptoms and/or that psychological factors are better predictors.

Evidence that invasive treatment, non-invasive non-psychological treatment and opioids are ineffective for chronic pain.
Studies of the neuroscience of chronic pain including the key role of altered nerve pathways in the brain.


Evidence for the benefits of expressive writing, reappraisal of arousal and exercise.


The prevalence and economic impact of PPD.


Bibliography

   “Reviewed 23 studies (13 RCTs and 10 case series with pre/post assessments). Of these, 21/23 (91.3%), 11/12 (91.6%), 16/19 (76.2%) and 7/9 (77.8%) reported significant or possible effects on physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, social-occupational function and healthcare utilization respectively. Meta-analysis was possible for 14 studies and revealed significant effects on physical symptoms, psychiatric symptoms and social adjustment which were maintained in long-term follow-up”

   In a review of 71 studies, individuals who reported exposure to trauma were 2.7 (95% CI = 2.27 – 3.10) times more likely to have a functional somatic syndrome. The magnitude of the association with PTSD was significantly larger than with sexual or physical abuse. Chronic fatigue syndrome had a larger association with reported trauma than either irritable bowel syndrome or fibromyalgia.

   The prevalence of PTSD symptoms in their chronic pain population was 28%, four-fold higher than in the general population. Patients with chronic pain and PTSD were younger and reported more severe pain than those without PTSD.

“Stressful life events in childhood/adolescence and in adulthood seem to be very common in FMS. Furthermore, the life events were experienced as more negative than the life events experienced by healthy controls.”


In seven RCTs involving 864 patients with low back pain, MBSR compared to usual care led to short term improvements in pain intensity and physical functioning that were not sustained in the long term. Disability, mental health, pain acceptance and mindfulness also were not significantly different in the short or long term.


“Pain experience is strongly modulated by interactions of ascending and descending pathways. Understanding these modulatory mechanisms in health and in disease is critical for developing fully effective therapies for the treatment of clinical pain conditions.”


“This study offers support for the notion that the way adverse events are processed cognitively can be associated with physical symptoms in CD.”


“The expressive writing, positive writing and time management control writing groups all reported significantly fewer mental and physical symptoms for at least 4 months post-writing.”


RCT of 36 patients with urinary symptoms without organic lesions with follow-up of 4 years. Of the 13 who received intensive short-term dynamic psychotherapy (14 weekly sessions), 10 had complete relief and 3 had significant improvement. Depression, anxiety and hostility also improved. The 23 controls had traditional urologic care and no significant improvement was found.


“Whereas acute stress often results in analgesia, chronic stress can trigger hyperalgesia/allodynia. This influence of long-term stress on nociception is relevant to numerous painful pathologies, such as fibromyalgia (FM), characterized by diffuse muscular pain (hyperalgesia) and/or tenderness (allodynia). Hence, there is a need for pre-clinical models integrating a chronic-stress dimension to the study of pain.”


“Knee osteoarthritis shown on x-ray is an imprecise guide to the likelihood that knee pain or disability will be present. The results of knee x rays should not be used in isolation when assessing individual patients with knee pain.”

“The increase in negative pain-specific cognitions during depressed mood predicted the perceived increase in pain unpleasantness. Following depressed mood induction, brain responses to noxious thermal stimuli were characterized by increased activity in a broad network including prefrontal areas, subgenual anterior cingulate cortex, and hippocampus, as well as significantly less deactivation when compared with pain responses in a neutral mood.”


Women reporting the highest level of emotional abuse had 2.6 times the risk of PMS as those reporting no emotional abuse. Women reporting severe childhood physical abuse had an odds ratio of 2.1 compared with those reporting no physical abuse. Sexual abuse was less strongly associated with risk.


“In patients with chronic noncancer low back pain, morphine and other strong opioids in dosages of up to 100mg/day were only slightly more effective than their placebos, no more effective than acetaminophen, and somewhat less effective than nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).”


“Authors prospectively assessed 3,020 volunteer employees at a Boeing plant for risk factors of filing back injury claims. They followed the subjects for four years, and found that the 279 people who reported back problems had only one physical predictor: previous medical treatment. The most predictive individual factors were (1) job task dissatisfaction and (2) distress as reported on Scale 3 of the MMPI. “This data perhaps explains why the focus on purely physical and injury-related factors has met with little success in dealing with what has become the most expensive orthopedic problem.”


“A prospective study comparing symptomatic patients with disc herniations and asymptomatic volunteers. 76% of the asymptomatic group had disc herniations on MRIs. The authors caution that MRIs are not a good indicator of causes of pain.”


“A prospective study of 67 asymptomatic individuals had MRIs in 1989. 31% had an identifiable abnormality in the spine. Seven years later the investigators looked at these subjects to see how they were doing. The findings on magnetic resonance scans were not predictive of the development or duration of low-back pain. Individuals with the longest duration of low-back pain did not have the greatest degree of anatomical abnormality on the original, 1989 scans.”


Thirty-three articles reporting imaging findings for 3110 asymptomatic individuals met our study inclusion criteria. The prevalence of disk degeneration in
asymptomatic individuals increased from 37% of 20-year-old individuals to 96% of 80-year-old individuals. Disk bulge prevalence increased from 30% of those 20 years of age to 84% of those 80 years of age. Disk protrusion prevalence increased from 29% of those 20 years of age to 43% of those 80 years of age.


“This experiment applied laser-induced pain to the skin of three groups, people with fibromyalgia, people with osteoarthritis, and a group of healthy controls. Though there was no difference between the three groups in the degree of pain experienced, both the fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis groups had abnormal anticipatory responses to pain, suggesting that these may represent common brain mechanisms for both chronic regional and widespread pain.”


“Two randomised placebo-controlled trials show the importance of establishing the efficacy of procedures before adopting them into clinical practice.”


“This was an initial trial of a newly developed therapy aimed at psychological attribution and emotional awareness and expression. They treated 72 patients and did pre-and post-treatment assessments and a six-month follow-up. Pain was reduced following treatment, and was either maintained or enhanced at the six-month follow-up.”


“Patients with MUPS may best be viewed as having complex adaptive systems in which cognitive and physiological processes interact with each other and with their environment. Cognitive behavioural therapy and antidepressant drugs are both effective treatments, but their effects may be greatest when the patient feels empowered by their doctor to tackle their problem.”


Spouses of deployed servicemen had significantly higher perceived stress scores than spouses of nondeployed service members (p <.001). Somatization scores were also significantly higher in spouses of deployed versus nondeployed servicemen (p <.001). A significant positive correlation was found between level of perceived stress and level of somatization (r = .878, p <.001).


“Study found that insomnia and catastrophising increase pain in people with knee arthritis.”


“The authors point to the practice of doing MRIs on first time episodes of lower back pain (LBP), and interpreting the abnormal results as causing the pain. They did a prospective study of 200 subjects over five years. MRIs were done at the beginning on people with no LBP. They then compared these baselines with MRIs taken during episodes of LBP and find
no significant differences. Most new changes represent progressive age changes not associated with acute events.”


A sophisticated x-ray exam was done to carefully select patients who were most likely to have pain relief from spinal fusion surgery. Even under those strict conditions, in only 27% was the outcome considered highly effective and in 57% it was not even minimally acceptable. In the same study, in a comparison group having spine fusion for a non-pain condition (spondylolisthesis), the corresponding figures were 72% and 9%.


“Compared outcomes post-surgery between people on workers compensation and matched subject not on workers compensation. Only 16-19% of workers compensation patients showed improvement, while 36-40% of patients not on workers compensation showed improvement.”


“The authors set out to assess whether depression is an independent risk factor for severe neck and back pain. They followed 790 randomly selected adults for 12 months, and found that depression was a strong independent predictor for the onset of intense or disabling neck and low back pain.”


“This study found that in patients with chronic low back pain, ambivalence about expressing emotions was positively correlated with both pain and anger.”


“Approximately 20% of subjects exposed to placebo, low-velocity rear-end collisions will thus indicate WAD, even though no biochemical potential for injury exists. Certain psychological profiles place an individual at higher risk for phenomenon.”


“The effectiveness and safety of long-term opioid therapy for treatment of CLBP remains Unproven.”


MBSR and CBT were provided to groups for up to two hours weekly for eight weeks. Eighteen weeks after the sessions, clinically meaningful improvement in disability was found in 61% of MBSR and 58% of CBT patients vs only 44% of UC patients. Clinically meaningful improvement in how bothersome the pain felt was found in 44% of MBSR, 45% of CBT but only 27% of UC
patients. These are modest benefits. Studies of Pain Reprocessing Therapy and Emotional Awareness and Expression Therapy have documented better outcomes.


“The authors found a causal connection between economic insecurity and physical pain. They reviewed five studies and found that economic stress caused physical pain and also decreased pain tolerance. Another study found that financial problems predicted the use of pain relief medication. Their analysis includes a meta-analysis of the included studies.”


“Reviewed online databases of RCTs and systematic reviews. Surgery for radiculopathy with herniated lumbar disc and symptomatic spinal stenosis is associated with short-term benefits compared to nonsurgical therapy, though benefits diminish with long-term follow-up in some trials. For non-radicular back pain with common degenerative changes, fusion is no more effective than intensive rehabilitation, but associated with small to moderate benefits compared to standard nonsurgical therapy.”


“Epidural corticosteroid injections for radiculopathy were associated with immediate reductions in pain and function. However, benefits were small and not sustained, and there was no effect on long-term surgery risk. Limited evidence suggested no effectiveness for spinal stenosis.”


“The author cites the data that 25-33% of primary care patients have medically unexplained symptoms. He advocates a systematic approach to interviewing patients based on his experience doing so with 7,000 patients, leading to better outcomes. In so doing doctors can identify psychophysiological disorders. He lays out ways of talking to patients who may be skeptical about psychological links to their physical symptoms, and also outlines a treatment approach, and the article is illustrated with numerous case vignettes.”


“Eight of 20 (40%) dominant shoulders had findings consistent with partial- or full-thickness tears of the rotator cuff as compared with none (0%) of the nondominant shoulders. Five of 20 (25%) dominant shoulders had magnetic resonance imaging evidence of Bennett’s lesions compared with none (0%) of the nondominant shoulders. None of the athletes interviewed 5 years later had any subjective symptoms or had required any evaluation or treatment for shoulder-related problems during the study period.”


“These findings support the view that a condition of chronic stress used in the laboratory to reproduce the biological features of depression can enhance hyperalgesia induced by nitroglycerin administration. These observations may be relevant to pain disorders, and particularly to migraine, since nitroglycerin is able to induce spontaneous-like pain attacks in humans, and an unfavourable migraine outcome (transformation into a chronic daily headache) is associated with chronic stress and comorbid depression.”

“The most consistent predictors of back pain were the protective factors decision control, empowering leadership and fair leadership. Some of the most important predictors included in this study were factors that have previously received little attention in back pain research.”


Results provide evidence that individuals who report abusive or neglectful childhood experiences are at increased risk of experiencing chronic pain in adulthood relative to individuals not reporting abuse or neglect in childhood.


Compared to healthy controls, Somatoform Disorder (SD) patients showed reduced gray matter in the hypothalamus, left fusiform gyrus, right cuneus, left inferior frontal gyrus, left posterior cingulate and right amygdala. Greater clinical symptomatology correlated with greater reductions in gray matter in frontal-limbic and parietal regions. Results suggest selective impairments in specific cortico-limbic regions associated with two overlapping circuits, the neuromatrix of pain and the emotion regulation system.


“The authors used hypnotic suggestion of pain to generate the experience of pain with no injury. The fMRI of the brains of these subjects indicated activation of the same brain areas activated in physical pain.”


Recent studies document a 629% increase in Medicare expenditures for epidural steroid injections; a 423% increase in expenditures for opioids for back pain; a 307% increase in the number of lumbar magnetic resonance images among Medicare beneficiaries; and a 220% increase in spinal fusion surgery rates. The limited studies available suggest that these increases have not been accompanied by population-level improvements in patient outcomes or disability rates.


Abuse history is associated with gastrointestinal illness and psychological disturbance; appears more often among women, patients with functional gastrointestinal disorders, and patients seen in referral settings; is not usually known by the physician; and is associated with poorer adjustment to illness and adverse health outcome.


During severe illness, the patient had major psychosocial impairment, high life stress, a low visceral pain threshold, and activation of the midcingulate cortex (MCC), prefrontal area 6/44, and the somatosensory cortex, areas associated with pain intensity encoding. When clinically improved, there was resolution in activation of these 3 areas, and this was associated with psychosocial improvement and an increased threshold to rectal distention.

The treatment of patients with medically unexplained symptoms in primary care: A review of the literature. Mental Health and Family Medicine, 7, 209–221.

Medically unexplained symptoms (MUS) are among the most common and frustrating in primary care. Our goal was to review published evidence to guide busy general practitioners working with a culturally diverse, challenging patient population coping with MUS. A search of PubMed and PsycINFO from 1985 to the present was conducted using MUS and related terms. The literature was then organised into sub-categories based on its relevance to primary care. We conclude with a description of gaps in the literature based on the literature review and the clinical experience of the authors.

   “Introducing the hypermnesia–hyperarousal model, which focuses on two psychoneurobiological aspects of the physiology of learning. This hypothesis provides an answer to the hitherto open question about the origin of pain persistence and pain sensitization following a traumatic event and also provides a straightforward explanatory model for educational purposes.”

   “A neuroimaging study examined the neural correlates of social exclusion and tested the hypothesis that the brain bases of social pain are similar to those of physical pain.”

   “The author speculates that the human social attachment system may have “co-opted” the pain system. She summarizes the research exploring whether social and physical pain share the same neural systems, that is, “experiences of social pain activate neural regions that are also involved in physical pain processing.” The ramifications of this are explored, and found that “individual differences in sensitivity to one kind of pain relate to individual differences in sensitivity to the other and that factors that modulate one type of pain experience affect the other in a similar manner.”

   “The author summarizes and addresses the controversy surrounding the findings in her previous article (above). Her conclusions include this statement: “There is a strong tendency among those who study and treat pain to view pain as a physical phenomenon that is caused by damage to the body. Nonetheless, years of research have shown that there can be tissue damage with no pain (e.g., wounded soldiers in battle) as well as severe pain with no tissue damage (e.g., migraines, fibromyalgia). These dissociations illustrate that, from an experiential perspective, the critical component of painful experience may stem from the mental experience of suffering.”

   “The patient was a 32-year-old woman diagnosed with grade III spondylolisthesis at the age of 18. While the patient had not experienced back pain in recent years, she anticipated a recurrence of symptoms during her final trimester of pregnancy. Lumbar magnetic resonance imaging was used to confirm the presence of grade IV spondylolisthesis”

   The landmark initial description of the biopsychosocial model.

They got knee MRIs from 991 subjects, ages 50-90 years old. The findings indicated that meniscal tears are common in the general population and increases with age. However, 61% of the subjects who had meniscal tears in their knees had not had any pain, aching, or stiffness during the previous month.


A significantly greater proportion of patients in the intervention group had physical symptoms rated by clinicians as “very much improved” or “much improved” compared with those in the usual care group (60% vs 26%). The intervention’s effect on unexplained physical symptoms was greatest at treatment completion, led to relief of symptoms in more than one-half of the patients, and persisted months after the intervention, although its effectiveness gradually diminished.


“We found a strong graded relationship between the breadth of exposure to abuse or household dysfunction during childhood and multiple risk factors for several of the leading causes of death in adults.” A landmark paper that launched the ACE movement.


“Other than a history of LBP, pre-existing psychological distress was the only factor found to have a pre-existing influence on new episodes of LBP.”


“Pleasant imagery (PI) was an effective intervention in reducing fibromyalgic pain during the 28-day study period. Amitriptyline had no significant advantage over placebo during the study period.”


“This study looked at patients from the workers compensation program who had had lumbar surgery to look for predictive factors for disability and reoperation. Most patients reported that back pain (67.7%) was worse and overall quality of life (55.8%) was no better or worse than before surgery.”


“This is a RCT multi-site study with 2-year follow-up with independent observer comparing pain and disability outcomes between surgery and non-surgery for lower back pain. The non-surgical group had physical therapy, and the surgical group had fusion surgery. Surgical group’s pain was reduced by 33% and the non-surgical group by 7%. Pain improved most in the first six months, and then gradually got worse.”


In 2008, according to the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), about 100 million adults in the United States were affected by chronic pain, including joint pain or arthritis. Using the 2008 MEPS, we estimated 1) the portion of total U.S. health care costs...
attributable to pain; and 2) the annual costs of pain associated with lower worker productivity. We found that the total costs ranged from $560 to $635 billion in 2010 dollars.

   “No really effective, let alone disease-modifying, therapy exists for osteoarthritis. This editorial suggests that controlled research has continued to provide support for the efficacy of psychosocial interventions in treating pain from osteoarthritis.”

   “Patients with postoperative ongoing sciatic pain have been shown to exhibit reduced cortisol levels along with enhanced IL-6 levels. The aim of the present study was to clarify the relationship between a reduced cortisol secretion and enhanced cytokine levels by performing a prospective study on patients with disc herniation. These findings suggest that chronically stressed patients are at a higher risk for a poor surgical outcome as their reduced cortisol secretion promotes the postoperative ongoing synthesis of proinflammatory cytokines.”

   “Child traumatic events are significantly related to chronic pain. Since the problem of child abuse is broader than physical and sexual abuse, health and rehabilitation agencies must shift from individualized treatment to interdisciplinary treatment of the family and patient.”

   “This is a very good summary article, appropriate for the general public, that includes some review of the research listed in this bibliography. Also publishes some of Dr. Sarno’s retrospective studies of his patient’s recoveries.”

   “Depression-vulnerable college students (with both elevated prior depressive symptoms and low current depressive symptoms) wrote on 3 consecutive days in either an expressive writing or a control condition. As predicted, participants scoring above the median on the suppression scale of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) showed significantly lower depression symptoms at the 6-month assessment when they wrote in the expressive writing versus the control condition.”

   “In this new model central sensitization is part of an ensemble that includes also the symptoms of widespread pain, fatigue, unrefreshing sleep and dyscognition. The main feature is an intrinsic program that produces this ensemble to guide behavior to restore normal function in conditions that threaten survival.”

   Over a 9 week period, participants in the anger-expression group (n=51) experienced greater improvement in control over pain and depressed mood, and marginally greater improvement in pain severity than the control group (n=51). Degree of expressed anger uniquely accounted for intervention effects and meaning-making mediated effects on depressed mood.

69. Gündel, H., Valet, M., Sorg, C., Huber, D., Zimmer, C., Sprenger, T., & Tölle, T.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pain.2007.10.003  
Comparing somatoform pain disorder patients with controls, a pain related hypoactive state of the ventromedial prefrontal/orbitofrontal cortex (BA 10/11) and a hyperactive state of the parahippocampal gyrus, amygdala and anterior insula were found in the patient group. Our findings of an altered cerebral processing of experimentally induced pain in patients with somatoform pain disorder support the hypothesis of dysfunctional pain processing, especially in affect regulating regions.

http://dx.doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2012.736367  
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is associated with both (1) ‘ill-defined’ or ‘medically unexplained’ somatic syndromes, e.g. unexplained dizziness, tinnitus and blurry vision, and syndromes that can be classified as somatoform disorders (DSM-IV-TR); and (2) a range of medical conditions, with a preponderance of cardiovascular, respiratory, musculoskeletal, neurological, and gastrointestinal disorders, diabetes, chronic pain, sleep disorders and other immune-mediated disorders in various studies.

Ten trials reported on a total of 12 randomised comparisons of multidisciplinary treatment and a control condition. There was strong evidence that intensive multidisciplinary biopsychosocial rehabilitation with functional restoration improves function when compared with inpatient or outpatient non-multiprofessional treatments.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1192/bjp.163.3.315  
For women, psychotherapy was found to be superior to supportive listening. There was a similar trend for men, but this did not reach significance. Following completion of the trial, patients in the control group were offered psychotherapy; 33 accepted and following treatment experienced a marked improvement in their symptoms. At follow-up 1 yr later, those patients who had received psychotherapy remained well, patients who had dropped out of the trial were unwell with severe symptoms.

“This is an editorial commenting on a study in the same issue that showed that substituting rapid MRI neither saved money nor led to improved clinical outcomes. Rather, the data suggested that substituting rapid MRI increases cost in part because it predisposes patients to undergo surgical intervention. The author makes the point that there has yet to be any evidence that a structural issue causes back pain. Therefore, “Imaging only serves to bolster the notion that back pain is nothing more than the symptom of an underlying disease. This is a social construct that nurtures an enormous treating enterprise far more than it helps the patient.”

A review of 32 studies from 24 countries published from 1990 – 2012. At least one type of somatoform disorder was diagnosable by DSM-IV and/or ICD-10 criteria in 26% to 35% of primary care patients. The percentage of patients complaining of at least one medically unexplained symptom ranged from 40% to 49%.

ACT is efficacious particularly for enhancing general, mostly physical functioning, and for decreasing distress, in comparison to inactive treatment comparisons but pain severity changed little.


“Given the parallel mechanisms underlying the physiologic effects of a maladaptive response to pain and non–pain-related stressors, physical therapists should consider screening for non–pain-related stress to facilitate treatment, prevent chronic disability, and improve quality of life.”


“People with depression carry three times the average risk of psychiatric disorders.’ Nearly all sensory inputs applied to the upper body result in wave power sufficiently large to quench fear–memory networks regardless of input location and type and whether the sensory input is applied unilaterally or bilaterally.”


Compared with controls, the patients with chronic pelvic pain showed significantly greater prevalence of lifetime major depression, current major depression, lifetime substance abuse, adult sexual dysfunction, and somatization. They were also 3-fold (64% vs 23%) more likely than controls to have been a victim of childhood and adult sexual abuse. There were no significant differences in either the degree or type of pelvic disease between patients with pelvic pain and controls (affecting about 1/3 of each group).


“People suffering from depression, for example, tend to experience more severe and long-lasting pain than other people. Treatment is challenging when pain overlaps with anxiety or depression. Focus on pain can mask both the clinician's and patient's awareness that a psychiatric disorder is also present. Even when both types of problems are correctly diagnosed, they can be difficult to treat. A review identified a number of treatment options available when pain occurs in conjunction with anxiety or depression.”


“This study looked at how activation in the brain shifts when pain shifts from acute pain to chronic pain. “We observed that brain activity for back pain in the early, acute/subacute back pain group is limited to regions involved in acute pain, whereas in the chronic back pain group, activity is confined to emotion-related circuitry.”


Among 43 CFS patients, exposure to childhood trauma was associated with a 3- to 8-fold increased risk for CFS across different trauma types compared to 60 non-fatigued controls. There was a graded relationship between the degree of trauma exposure and CFS risk. Childhood trauma was associated with greater CFS symptom severity and with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. The risk for CFS conveyed by childhood trauma increased with the presence of concurrent psychopathology.

“This study compared 33 survivors of sexual assault with 33 matched adults with no sexual assault history. They gave each group identical pain stimuli, but the sexual assault survivors experienced the same stimuli as more painful. They hypothesize reasons for this finding.”


“This sickness absence is a major public health and economic problem. In 2003, 176 million working days were lost; up 10 million on the previous year. Each week 1 million people report sick, 3000 of whom will still be away from work at six months.”


“This RCT studied 45 women with fibromyalgia and randomly assigned them to a manualized therapy called Affective Self-Awareness or a waitlist control group. The intervention group had significantly lower pain severity (p<0.001), higher self-reported physical function (p<0.001), and higher tender-point threshold (p=0.02) at 6 months compared to the control group.”


“Three retrospective case studies of people with at least four years of chronic pain before treatment. The treatment involves a 90-minute intake session, assigning the reading of Sarno’s Mind-Body Prescription, then three weekly 2-hour group sessions. All three were pain-free at six month follow-up.”


“Arousal reappraisal instructs individuals to think of stress arousal as a tool that helps maximize performance. By reframing the meaning of the physiological signals that accompany stress, arousal reappraisal breaks the link between negative affective experiences and malignant physiological responses. We demonstrate how this approach can benefit physiological reactivity, attention, and performance and explore its potential applications.”


“We examined whether reappraising stress-induced arousal could improve cardiovascular outcomes and decrease attentional bias for emotionally-negative information. Reappraising arousal shows physiological and cognitive benefits. Implications for health and potential clinical applications are discussed.”


“A classic study in which MRIs were performed on 98 people with no back pain. They found that only 36% of these people had normal spines, the other 64% had various evidence of disc degeneration. “Given the high prevalence of these findings and of back pain, the discovery by MRI of bulges or protrusions in people with low back pain may frequently be coincidental.”

“Several studies have shown that early life adversity is associated with CWP in later life; however, the majority are retrospective and suffer from potential recall bias. Using data from the 1958 British Birth Cohort Study, the aim of the current study was to examine, prospectively, the relationship between childhood physical and psychological adversity and CWP in adulthood.”


“We randomly assigned 131 patients who had one to three painful osteoporotic vertebral compression fractures to undergo either vertebroplasty or a simulated procedure without cement (control group). Improvements in pain and pain-related disability associated with osteoporotic compression fractures in patients treated with vertebroplasty were similar to the improvements in a control group.”


“The results of our study show an equal to or higher prevalence of meniscal lesions in male professional basketball players than previously reported in the literature. We found a large number of patella-femoral articular cartilage lesions in our study population of male professional basketball players. These athletes perform at the highest demand level, which indicates that the presence of these lesions did not cause any symptoms.”


“The degree of disc displacement in magnetic resonance imaging did not correlate with any subjective symptoms, nor did nerve root enhancement or nerve compression.”


“As a conclusion, the effect of treatments for LBP is only small to moderate. Therefore, there is a dire need for developing more effective interventions.”


“To examine joint associations of 12 childhood adversities with first onset of 20 DSM–IV disorders in World Mental Health (WMH) Surveys in 21 countries. Childhood adversities have strong associations with all classes of disorders at all life-course stages in all groups of WMH countries. Long-term associations imply the existence of as-yet undetermined mediators.”


“Included seven RCTs in this review and found moderate evidence to suggest that there is no benefit to arthroscopic surgery in comparison with non-operative or sham treatments in middle-aged patients with mild or no concomitant osteoarthritis. The authors recommend a trial of non-operative management as the first-line treatment for such patients.”


Our study demonstrates that both somatic and nonsomatic dysfunction in FM, including clinical pain, pain catastrophizing, autonomic dysfunction, and amplified temporal summation, are closely linked with the degree to which evoked deep tissue pain alters S1 connectivity to salience/affective pain-processing regions. Additionally, diminished connectivity between S1 subregions during the rest phase in FM may result from ongoing widespread clinical pain.
   “All lumbar disc degenerations are not pathologic, especially in children and adolescents.”

   Patients with Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD) had greater functional connectivity on fMRI study within the sensorimotor network (SMN), default mode network (DMN) and salience network than healthy controls. Patients with SSD also had increased functional connectivity between the SMN and DMN, the SMN and salience network, SMN and dorsal attention network (DAN) and salience network and DAN. This suggests that SSD may be associated with alterations of sensory-discriminative processing of pain and other somatic symptoms, which is influenced by affective processing.

   A literature search was performed through PubMed and Ovid using the terms fibromyalgia, temporomandibular joint disorder, irritable bowel syndrome, irritable bladder/interstitial cystitis, headache, chronic low back pain, chronic neck pain, functional syndromes, and somatization. The extant literature presents considerable overlap in the pathophysiology of these diagnoses.

   “RCT comparing 86 patients who had surgery for osteoarthritis of the knee with 86 who underwent physical and medical therapy. There was no difference in outcome between the two groups.”

   "Central sensitivity syndromes" denotes an emerging nomenclature that could be embraced by researchers investigating each of these disorders. Moreover, a shared paradigm would be useful in promoting cross-fertilization between researchers. Scientists and clinicians could most effectively forward the understanding and treatment of fibromyalgia and other common chronic pain disorders through an appreciation of their shared pathophysiology.

   A total of 31 controlled trials (29 randomized and 2 nonrandomized) was identified. Twenty-five studies targeted a specific syndrome (e.g. chronic fatigue, irritable bowel, pain) while 6 focused on more general somatization or hypochondriasis. Primary outcome assessment included physical symptoms, psychological distress and functional status in 28, 26 and 19 studies, respectively. Physical symptoms appeared the most responsive: CBT-treated patients improved more than control subjects in 71% of the studies and showed possibly greater improvement (i.e., a trend) in another 11% of the studies. A definite or possible advantage of CBT for reducing psychological distress was demonstrated in only 38% and 8% of studies respectively, and for improving functional status in 47% and 26%.

103. Kross E, Berman MG, Mischel W, Smith EE and Wager TD (2011) PNAS 108 (15) 6270-6275; [https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1102693108](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1102693108)
   When people who recently experienced an unwanted break-up view a photograph of their ex-partner as they think about being rejected—areas that support the sensory
components of physical pain (secondary somatosensory cortex; dorsal posterior insula) become active.


“Using functional neuroimaging studies, they compared pain from arthritis to experimental pain (acute pain). The acute pain activated the brain structures knows as the “pain matrix.” However, the pain from arthritis activated the cingulate cortex, the thalamus, and the amygdala; these areas are involved in the processing of fear, emotions, and in aversive conditioning.”


Forty-one trials were included in the meta-analysis, comprising data from 2290 individuals. Psychological therapies had a medium effect on GI symptom severity (effect size = 0.69) immediately after treatment. On average, individuals who received psychotherapy had a greater reduction in GI symptoms after treatment than 75% of individuals assigned to a control condition. After short-term follow-up (1–6 months) and long-term follow-up (6–12 months), this effect remained significant and medium in magnitude (0.76 and 0.73, respectively).


“A growing body of evidence suggests that empathy for pain is underpinned by neural structures that are also involved in the direct experience of pain. In order to assess the consistency of this finding, an image-based meta-analysis of nine independent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) investigations and a coordinate-based meta-analysis of 32 studies that had investigated empathy for pain using fMRI were conducted.”


25-33% of primary care patients suffer from Psychophysiologic disorders.


“While other studies have shown that early adversity is a risk factor for later chronic pain, no mechanism for this link has been proposed. The authors propose that since survivors of early adversity have difficulty being aware of and expressing distressing emotions, that physical pain can help them to manage these by competing for attention with them. Paying attention to physical pain is reinforced then, as a way to avoid intolerable emotional pain.”


“Can a person's physical shape/posture/structure/biomechanics be the cause of their lower back pain?”


“This meta-analysis of tennis elbow found that in 36 RCTs with placebo controls, most patients experienced pain resolution after receiving placebo within 4 weeks of follow-up. At
best, all treatments provided only small pain relief while increasing the odds of adverse events.”


“Activities in the right and left DLPFC loaded on separate PC and correlated negatively with perceived intensity and unpleasantness. The inter-regional correlation of midbrain and medial thalamic activity was significantly reduced during high left DLPFC activity, suggesting that its negative correlation with pain affect may result from dampening of the effective connectivity of the midbrain-medial thalamic pathway. In contrast, right DLPFC activity was associated with a weakened relationship of the anterior insula with both pain intensity and affect. We propose that the DLPFC exerts active control on pain perception by modulating corticosubcortical and corticocortical pathways.”


“This RCT compared Emotional Awareness and Expression Therapy (EAET) with fibromyalgia education and CBT for symptom management. The 230 patients with fibromyalgia were assessed pre- and post-treatment and the EAET group did better overall than the education group, and had some advantages over CBT in terms of pain relief.”


“Greater pain treatment efficacy may be possible if clinicians: (a) distinguish patients with primarily centralized (i.e., somatoform or nociceptive) pain from those with primarily peripheral (nociceptive, inflammatory, or neuropathic) pain; (b) acknowledge the capacity of the brain not only to modulate pain but also generate as well as attenuate or eliminate centralized pain; (c) consider the powerful role that adverse life experiences and psychological conflicts play in centralized pain; and (d) integrate emotional processing and interpersonal changes into treatment. Our integrative treatment involves delivering a progression of interventions, as needed, to achieve pain reduction: tailored pain neuroscience education, cognitive and mindfulness skills to decrease the pain danger alarm mechanism, behavioral engagement in avoided painful and other feared activities, emotional awareness and expression to reverse emotional avoidance and overcome trauma or psychological conflict, and adaptive communication to decrease interpersonal stress.” Meticulously documented with over 100 references.


This article presents the rationale for EAET, describes its principles and techniques, reviews its development and early testing as well as recent clinical trials, and critically analyzes the evidence base.


“This prospective study looked at two groups of patients who had surgery: a group of men and women undergoing total knee replacements who had pain pre-surgery, and a group of women with no pre-surgical pain who would have breast surgery for cancer. The predictive value of measures of anxiety, depression and catastrophising were assessed, and it was found that anxiety, level of pain immediately post-surgery, and catastrophising predicted pain at 3 months post-surgery, regardless of which surgery was done.”

“MRI indicated degenerative changes in the lumbar spine in 79 subjects (84 %), with decreased disc signal intensity in 74.5 %, posterior disc protrusion in 78.7 %. Degenerative findings in both the lumbar and cervical spine, suggesting tandem disc degeneration, was common in asymptomatic subjects. These results provide normative data for evaluating patients with degenerative lumbar and cervical disc diseases.”


“In clinic studies, altered hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis function has been associated with fibromyalgia, a syndrome characterised by chronic widespread body pain. These results may be explained by the associated high rates of psychological distress and somatisation. We address the hypothesis that the latter, rather than the pain, might explain the HPA results.”


“In this review, we examine new scientific and clinical evidence that demonstrates the direct role that steroids play in the generation and clinical management of chronic pain. We will discuss the new findings demonstrating the fact that steroids and related mediators produce paradoxical effects on pain such as analgesia, hyperalgesia, and even placebo analgesia.”


“Examined five RCT studies comparing surgery to non-surgical approaches to chronic back pain. Found methodological problems in all five studies. However, concluded that surgery is better than unstructured nonsurgical care, but structured therapy was better than surgery.”


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpain.2015.05.005

“Explaining Pain (EP) refers to a range of educational interventions that aim to change one's understanding of the biological processes that are thought to underpin pain as a mechanism to reduce pain itself. “The core objective of the EP approach to treatment is to shift one's conceptualization of pain from that of a marker of tissue damage or disease to that of a marker of the perceived need to protect body tissue.” “We contend that...available behavioral evidence is supportive.”


“Compared return-to-work (RTW) data, permanent disability, postsurgical complications, opiate utilization, and reoperation status for chronic low back pain subjects who had lumbar fusion surgery with nonsurgical controls. They concluded that lumbar fusion surgery for the diagnoses of disc degeneration, disc herniation, and/or radiculopathy in a Workers Compensation setting is associated with significant increase in disability, opiate use, prolonged work loss, and poor RTW status. In addition, in the surgical patients group, 36% had complications, 27% needed reoperation.”


A cross-sectional analysis of 3,081 individuals presenting with chronic pain was performed using validated measures and a history of abuse was assessed via patient self-report. Multivariate logistic regression showed that individuals with a history of abuse (n=470; 15.25%) had greater depression, greater anxiety, worse physical functioning, greater pain
severity, worse pain interference, higher catastrophizing, and higher scores on the Fibromyalgia Survey criteria ($P < .001$ for all comparisons).


“This study aimed to estimate the prevalence and risk factors for medically unexplained symptoms across a variety of specialities. Medically unexplained symptoms are common across general/internal medicine and represent the most common diagnosis in some specialities. Medical behavior, training, and management need to take this into account.”


“In all your patients whose symptoms are of functional origin, the whole problem of diagnosis and treatment depends on your insight into the patient’s character and personal life.” Detailed discussion of PPD as relevant today as it was nearly a century ago.


At the 20-week end point, days with headache were reduced from the baseline 21 days per month by 11.5 for the CBT plus amitriptyline group vs 6.8 for the headache education plus amitriptyline group ($P = .002$).


“The authors experimentally examined the effects of anger suppression on pain perception. Participants who were instructed to suppress experiential or expressive components of emotion during harassment reported the greatest pain levels. “Results suggest that attempts to suppress anger may amplify pain sensitivity...”

http://dx.doi.org/10.1089/dis.2006.9.349

High-utilizing patients with medically unexplained physical symptoms who participated in a reflecting interview had reduced total health care costs, primarily through the reduction of hospitalization or inpatient expenses, despite a modest increase in outpatient primary care clinic visits.


Lists several reports finding that between 32 – 88% of patients with PNES had experienced physical or sexual child abuse, much higher than in epilepsy patients or the general population.


“Animal studies suggest that fear inhibits pain whereas anxiety enhances it; however it is unclear whether these effects generalize to humans. Both subjective and physiological indicators (skin conductance level, heart rate) confirmed that the treatment conditions produced the targeted emotional states. These results support the view that emotional states modulate human pain reactivity.”

“Chronic stressful events induce biochemical, physiological and psychological changes, resulting in stress-related neuropsychiatric disorders, such as anxiety or depression.”


“Using data from the 10-year longitudinal Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, the authors demonstrate the link between child abuse and trauma of various types and the development of physical pain in adult life. People with 4 or more ACEs had twice as many painful conditions as those with no ACEs. They also examine the mediating role that anxiety and depression play in this linkage. The article is a bit difficult to read, but this piece summarizes it well: http://www.stressillness.com/blog/?p=1626.”


“51 patients diagnosed with PPD were treated and evaluated pre- and post-treatment using self-report measures. Mean Visual Analog Scale (VAS) scores decreased 52% for “average” pain (P9 units (P=.005). Medication usage decreased (P=.0008). Activity levels increased (P=.03). Participants aged >47 years and in pain for >3 years benefited the most.”


“In this retrospective study of 86 people who had lumbar spine surgery, those with three or more childhood traumas had 85% likelihood of unsuccessful outcome. Only 5% of the 19 patients with no childhood trauma had unsuccessful outcomes.”


Correlations revealed significant associations between ACEs and psychosocial factors, including traumatic life events, catastrophizing, fear of pain, depression, insomnia and sleep quality, aches and pains (r’s=0.2-0.5; p’s<0.05), as well as pain facilitation (r=0.2, p<0.05).


“These data suggest that derby drivers sustain less chronic neck pain after multiple car collision events than might otherwise be expected. Further study of this unique population of car drivers may contribute to understanding whiplash disorder.”


“The study included 21 professional and 18 collegiate hockey players. Self-reported symptoms were measured using a modified Oswestry Disability Questionnaire. Participants underwent 3-T MRI evaluation of the pelvis and hips. Given the high prevalence of MRI findings in asymptomatic hockey players, it is necessary to cautiously interpret the significance of these findings in association with clinical presentation.”

137. **Smith, R. C., Lein, C., Collins, C., Lyles, J. S., Given, B., Dwamena, F. C., . . . Given, C. W. (2003).** Treating patients with medically unexplained symptoms in...
primary care. Journal of General Internal Medicine, 18, 478–489.  
http://dx.doi.org/10.1046/j.1525-1497.2003.20815.x

We developed a multidimensional treatment plan by integrating several areas of the literature: collaborative/stepped care, cognitive-behavioral treatment, and the provider-patient relationship. The treatment is designed for primary care personnel (physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners) and deployed intensively at the outset; visit intervals are progressively increased as stability and improvement occur.

“Patients with mild to moderately severe asthma or rheumatoid arthritis who wrote about stressful life experiences had clinically relevant changes in health status at 4 months compared with those in the control group.”

http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7016.1328
At six months of follow up, the intervention group reported a higher recovery rate (odds ratio 0.40), a lower mean intensity of the physical symptoms, less impairment of sleep (odds ratio 0.38), lower frequency of the symptoms, fewer limitations in social and leisure activities, and reduced illness behaviour. At 12 months of follow up, the differences between the groups were largely maintained.

A history of childhood emotional abuse and neglect was associated with increased anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress and physical symptoms, as well as lifetime trauma exposure. Physical and sexual abuse and lifetime trauma were also significant predictors of physical and psychological symptoms.

“The effectiveness of injection therapy for low back pain is still debatable. Heterogeneity of target tissue, pharmacological agent, and dosage, generally found in RCTs, point to the need for clinically valid comparisons in a literature synthesis.”

“The 12-week yoga intervention was associated with greater improvements in mood and anxiety than a metabolically matched walking exercise. This is the first study to demonstrate that increased thalamic GABA levels are associated with improved mood and decreased anxiety.”

“We determined if cutaneous hyperalgesia and pain-induced c-Fos overexpression in the spinal cord produced by repeated forced swimming (FS) stress in the rat were related to changes in GABA neurotransmission by studying spinal release of GABA and the effect of positive modulation of GABA-A receptors with diazepam. In conclusion, stress-induced reduction in GABA-A receptor activation is involved in the development of FS stress-induced hyperalgesia.”

“This prospective study looked at people who had undergone three different surgical procedures for bunions. The authors note their surprise that neither the degree of deformity pre-surgery, nor the degree of residual deformity post-surgery significantly affected the improvement that patients experienced, including pain scores. This suggests that the degree of deformity is not a good predictor of pain nor of success of surgery.”


In this randomized clinical trial of 202 adults with acute low back pain from Sydney, Australia, adding intensive patient education to first-line care of patients was no better at improving pain outcomes than a placebo intervention.


“Emotional awareness and expression therapy (EAET) is an emotion-focused therapy for patients with a history of trauma or psychosocial adversity who suffer from centralized pain conditions. In this approach, patients are taught to understand that their pain is exacerbated or maintained by unresolved emotional experiences that influence neural pathways involved in pain. Patients are taught to become aware of these unresolved experiences, which include suppressed or avoided trauma, adversity, and conflict, and to adaptively express their emotions related to these experiences. Patients learn that control over pain can be achieved through emotional awareness and expression. Enhancing the patient’s capacity to approach an experience rather than inhibit or avoid important emotions and interpersonal interactions leads to increased engagement in life activities. Research indicates that EAET has a positive impact on pain intensity, pain interference, and depressive symptoms.” (from p 38)


“Training and provision of assistive devices are considered major interventions to prevent and treat low back pain (LBP) among workers exposed to manual material handling (MMH). None of the included RCTs and CCTs provided evidence that training and provision of assistive devices prevented LBP when compared to no intervention or another intervention.”


“These findings support etiological hypotheses suggesting a pivotal role for chronic stress in CFS and FM and may have important therapeutic implications.”


“The investigators showed that placebo can change fMRI images of the brain, demonstrating that pain perception is not dependent on physical or structural issues” at the site of pain.


“A longitudinal study was undertaken to analyse the development of posture and spinal mobility during growth and its relationship to low back pain and sports activities. Occasional
low back pain was reported by 38% of the children at the age of 15-16 years, but back pain was not related to posture, spinal mobility or physical activity.”


“There is evidence for the reverse causal relationship in which negative mood and emotion can lead to pain or exacerbate it. Here, we review findings from studies on the modulation of pain by experimentally induced mood changes and clinical mood disorders.”


Overall there is an absence of evidence for behaviour therapy, except a small improvement in mood immediately following treatment when compared with an active control. CBT has small positive effects on disability and catastrophising, but not on pain or mood, when compared with active controls. CBT has small to moderate effects on pain, disability, mood and catastrophising immediately post-treatment when compared with treatment as usual/waiting list, but all except a small effect on mood had disappeared at follow-up.


“The authors demonstrate an association between worsened measures of mental health and osteoarthritis pain and risk of pain flares. They recommend that mental health treatment is a way to prevent pain flares.”


The high adversity group showed greater temporal summation of second pain sensitization whereas the low-adversity group showed minimal sensitization. The high adversity group also showed blunted cardiac and skin conductance responses. These findings suggest that enhancement of central sensitization may provide a mechanism underlying the pain hypersensitivity and chronicity linked to childhood adversity.


“This study compared pain facilitation between 31 people reporting high levels of childhood adversity with 31 reporting low levels of childhood adversity. They found that the group with childhood adversity had greater levels of pain, correlated with their PTSD symptoms. The authors suggest that this finding helps explain why people who experience childhood adversity are more likely to experience widespread pain as adults.”


“A prospective survey found that only 37% of spinal surgeons used pre-surgical psychological screening (PPS), despite the North American Spine Society guidelines regarding the use of PPS. Depression is associated with longer recuperations, delayed returns to work, more postsurgical complications and failures to comply with medication schedules after patients leave the hospital.”


“Early detection of elevated depressive symptoms and high trauma exposure may identify individuals at greater risk for developing chronic pain syndromes who may benefit from early multidisciplinary intervention.”


Compared with treatment as usual, the interview led to significantly lower pain severity, pain interference, sleep problems, and global psychological symptoms.