



Introducing Health Sciences: The Pain Clinic

The Real Health Institute

Commentary

This is the Real Health Institute, a specialist pain clinic in West London, where a group of eight patients has come for a four week course that will, they hope, help reduce their chronic pain. All of them have been in constant pain for a long time, some as long as four or five years. Between them they've previously tried a whole variety of medical treatments and most of them are taking drugs to help cope with the pain. However, drugs are often not an ideal solution for people with a chronic condition since over the long term there can be issues with side effects. The Real Health Institute does not offer surgical procedures. Instead they offer a treatment that focuses particularly on physiotherapy, relaxation and on psychological approaches.

Man

I think it is important to differentiate between acute and chronic pain. Acute pain usually pathology or an injury and pain that one would expect, you know, to go away after a while, after a few days, and analgesics can be useful in those circumstances, but sadly there's also a proportion of the population who experience pain that won't go away, and if you follow the text books very closely between three and six months beyond the point of healing if the pain persists we can start talking about a chronic pain syndrome.

Man

The problem is that nearly everybody's biological training or nearly everybody's medical training stems from an increasingly biological waiting whereby it is very tempting to see a person with a problem of pain in their shoulder or their back and say well there must be primarily something going on here and I must be able to fix it, and it's a very good theory but the problem is it doesn't work, it has serious limitations in terms of its practical utility.

Woman

I have an issue with my thoracic part of my spine and in particular the nerves and ligaments and soft tissue around that area, so unfortunately no-one's been able to cure it as yet.

Woman

It starts in the base of my pain, in my back, and then the more I sit or walk or do anything I get secondary pain along the spine that way and right the way up the spine, and the worst problem is it leaves my leg numb so I can't walk properly.

Man

I've got severe nerve damage, I've got pain from my neck down my arm to the tips of my fingers, down my left side and on my chest.

Man

Just constant, there's no ups, no downs, or don't have good days, bad days, it's just constant pain.

Woman

I have a constant pain, I have, it's like somebody's behind me and they're grinding me with their knuckles all day long and other pain will be brought into the equation such as stabbing pains and like electric fault pains, but I have a constant crushing and grinding all day, all night, 24/7.

Man

I see my stump where I had my hand off, and my hand's telescoped to the end of my arm, and the pain is just like a dull aching pain all over, but if you push it you know in certain points I think it's something to do with the way the nerve endings are just torn up and the stuff like, and it's like electric shocks which pulsate when you push, it's like an electric shock which pulsates through my arm.

Man

The research that's taken place over the last twenty years has shown more and more convincingly that pain is better understood in terms of a bio-psycho-social paradigm where we need to integrate psychological and social factors alongside the biological.

Man

February the 8th 2005 when I had my hand cut off.

Man

It was a piece of wood.

Woman

I was in a car accident, a very minor car accident though, I was stationary and the car came into the side of me so, you know, initially I got out the car, talked to the woman, I was fine but I felt the pain going in my spine as I got back in the car and drove home.

Man

It went through my little finger and my wedding finger, and clamped them two together, and it came out back of my finger, wedding finger.

Woman

I was badly assaulted at work. I work as a social worker in a children's home and I had a young person basically who kicked off, and there was only two workers, it was a bad error on the work behalf, we weren't allowed to touch her, and it ended up with five hours of abuse. For our labours I was knocked unconscious so I don't really know all that happened, I don't remember much of it.

Woman

I had to move a piece of luggage for a passenger. I work for an airline and unfortunately the angle and the weight of the bag, I just dragged it and my back instantly went. Originally actually it was the whole right side of my back, lumbar and top of the back, but over time the lumbar pain seemed to actually to go with medication and such, but I've never ever been able to release any of the pain on the top half of the back.

Man

I feel very strongly about the fact that one cannot really separate mind and body. Whatever's going to happen to the body will affect the mind, and vice versa, and we understand any pain condition, and most certainly persistent pain from a bio-psycho-social perspective, so biologically something happened, whether it was sudden onset due to an accident, for example, or whether the pain just started for no apparent reason, it is inevitably going to affect the person psychologically, and also the social circumstances. Many of the patients that we do see have problems as far as the occupation is concerned and some of them lose their jobs and also it affects, obviously affects relationships etcetera, and there are also cultural issues and the way the society will respond to the person experiencing the pain will also affect the picture, so biologically and psychologically, and socially, I think we think about any pain condition along those terms, I think we're one step closer to understand the subjective experience of pain, because all pain is subjective at the end of the day, there's no objective measure for pain.

Woman

I've not yet returned to work, although I am hoping to in the next few months. My social life is gone, you know not being able to sit in a restaurant for hours or go out, you know and have fun as most young girls would do, but that's very difficult, and the driving, so I've lived very

reclusively I suppose in, you know I live in the middle of nowhere and you know I have lived like a recluse.

Woman

I've lost my career, I don't think I'll ever be able to go back to it, and I've done that for fifteen years, starting voluntarily, so it's all I know. A lot of simple housework I can't do, everything takes so much longer, and it's simple things like when my baby wants picking up I have to really think about whether I can do it and how I can do it, and she doesn't necessarily understand that I can't hug her, you know, I want to take her out to the park, she'll sob at the door to go out and I know I'm not going to make it to the park. It's a lot of different things that it affects an awful lot. My husband does a lot, yeah.