

Coalition for Safe and Effective Pain Management

Occupational Therapy Using the Biopsychosocial Approach

Treatment or Modality (approximately 400 to 500 words)

Description of treatment or modality offered by your profession or as a multidisciplinary effort that is a potential alternative to opioids.

As an alternative to opioids, individuals with chronic pain can benefit from working with an occupational therapist delivering care using a biopsychosocial approach to address and manage pain. Literature on the biopsychosocial approach emphasizes its use within multidisciplinary teams, however the scopes of practice of occupational therapists allows them to successfully address all areas considered within this approach. The biopsychosocial approach recognizes the biological, psychological, and social elements associated with chronic pain, and is congruent with the unique perspective used by occupational therapists which focuses on the relationship between a person, their daily activities, and their environment (Brown, 2012). Occupational therapists adopting a biopsychosocial approach work with individuals with chronic pain to manage their pain which allows them to be engaged in meaningful activities including paid employment.

Describe how this alternative is or can be used in Canada to reduce prevalence of opioid prescribing.

Through the biopsychosocial approach, it is recognized that each individual's pain experience is unique, and a range of psychosocial factors interact with physical pathology to impact his or her symptoms and subsequent disability (Gatchel, Peng, Peters, Fuchs & Turk, 2007). Psychological considerations associated with chronic pain can include the presence of anxiety and depression, the individual's beliefs, feelings of perceived control, and sense of vulnerability or resiliency. Social considerations include required activities of daily living, interpersonal relationships, environmental stressors, family environment and social expectations (Gatchel et al., 2007). These factors interact to influence an individual's experience of pain symptoms and disability; therefore, occupational therapists recognize the need to intervene in each of these areas when addressing pain management.

Occupational therapists can provide a combination of treatment modalities from the biopsychosocial perspective to meet an individual's unique needs. Potential treatments implemented by an occupational therapist to assist with pain management may include, but are not limited to:

- Therapeutic exercises (i.e. stretching, range of motion, flexibility, strengthening)
- Client education (i.e. joint protection, proper body mechanics, back education, falls prevention)
- Graded functional activity (i.e. reconditioning, workplace interventions, graduated return to work)
- Fatigue management (i.e. pacing, energy conservation)
- Environmental assessment and modifications (i.e. home or work site visit, ergonomic modifications, home modifications)
- Cognitive-behavioral strategies (i.e. positive reinforcement, progressive relaxation, biofeedback)
- Stress management skill development

- Mindfulness meditation
- Provision of splints, assistive devices (i.e. ergonomic kitchen tools, reachers, mobility devices)

By understanding an individual's pain experience, occupational therapists can implement an appropriate combination of the strategies previously listed to address the physiological, psychological and social aspects of pain. This will aid individuals in managing their pain so they can engage in the activities that they want and need to do everyday. Additionally, encouraging individuals to participate in activities, despite the presence of pain, empowers them to work towards their goals with less reliance on the medical system (Moon, McDonald & Van den Dolder, 2012), and ideally less reliance on opioids.

Describe how this treatment or modality is commonly accessed or delivered.

Occupational therapists work as members of multidisciplinary teams in inpatient, pain management, primary care, mental health and addiction, community, workplace, return-to-work clinic, long-term care facilities, and outpatient settings. Outside pain management clinics, pain is one area of a broader scope of practice for occupational therapist. The ability for occupational therapists to work with individuals in a multitude of settings, including the individual's workplace, allows occupational therapists complete a full, comprehensive assessment that assists in the tailoring of interventions related to pain management to meet the individual's needs.

Short Summary of Evidence (approximately 250 words)

Evidence supports the use of a biopsychosocial multidisciplinary approach to effectively reduce and manage pain, such as chronic low back pain (Devan, 2014; Kamper et al., 2015; Snodgrass, 2011; Gatchel et al., 2007). A systematic review by Snodgrass (2011) suggests that interventions for individuals with low back injuries and illnesses should incorporate a biopsychosocial, client-centred approach that includes actively involving the individual in the rehabilitation process at the beginning of the intervention process. This involves addressing the individual's psychosocial needs in addition to physical impairments (Snodgrass, 2011).

A rapid review by CADTH (2011) identified that outpatient multidisciplinary treatment programs for the treatment of adults with chronic pain conditions are efficient in reducing pain, improving biopsychosocial standing, and can reduce the use of prescription pain medications. When compared with usual care, multidisciplinary biopsychosocial rehabilitation decreased pain and disability to a moderate degree in those with chronic back pain (Kamper et al., 2015). When compared with physical rehabilitation alone, multidisciplinary biopsychosocial rehabilitation showed positive effects on pain, disability, and overall function (Kamper et al., 2015). Gatchel et al. (2009) found that individuals treated by a multidisciplinary team were four times less likely to require medical pain treatments at follow up appointments, demonstrating promising outcomes for the biopsychosocial approach to chronic pain management.

Resources

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