

## **MEDICAL MANAGEMENT AND SELF-MANAGEMENT**

*Richard W. Hanson, Ph.D.*

To better understand what pain self-management is about, we can begin by contrasting it with medical management. Medical and self-management represent the two fundamental approaches to pain management. Nearly everyone has had some experience with both approaches. First, what are the essential differences?

### **Medical Management**

- Responsibility for pain management placed primarily on the doctor or other medical expert
- Person with pain assumes a relatively passive role
- Emphasis on finding causes and cures
- Focus on the specific physical aspects of the pain condition
- Emphasis on medications and passive physical procedures

### **Self-Management**

- Responsibility for pain management on the person with the chronic pain condition
- Person with pain assumes a more active role
- Emphasis on healthy coping
- Focus on the chronic pain syndrome (includes the effects of pain and disability on your entire life)
- Emphasis on taking constructive action and on using mental pain control techniques

### **Which approach is better?**

The answer is both are important. Even though our program emphasizes self-management, we never accept anyone into the program who has not already undergone medical management, i.e., been evaluated and treated by a medical doctor. The key question is, when is it appropriate to rely on medical management and when is it more appropriate to use self-management? Most of you don't visit a doctor (medical management) every time you experience some ache or pain, or even when your chronic pain flares up. You take care of the problem on our own (self-management). However, there may be times when it would be a serious mistake to avoid seeking medical management. Medical management is certainly required for many episodes of acute pain (e.g., abdominal pain resulting from acute appendicitis). Likewise, there are many useful medications available for chronic pain sufferers. Making wise choices about when to seek medical management and when to self-manage pain is an important issue. When pain becomes chronic and all reasonable medical and surgical approaches aimed at cure have been tried, self-management becomes more important. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that not all self-management is necessarily healthy or constructive. Coping with pain by consuming large amounts of alcohol is a form of self-management (i.e., you

can do it on your own without going to a doctor), but it is not a very healthy or constructive approach. Obviously, our program emphasizes healthy and constructive self-management approaches.

### **Establishing Self-Management Goals**

One of the first steps in pain self-management is to establish realistic goals. Some goals may be short-term whereas others may be long-term. In fact, some goals may be life long.

### **Pain Self-Management Goal Exercise**

The following exercise was developed to help you identify some general self-management goals. Please rate each of the following statements in terms of how important they are to you personally. Before each statement place a number from 1 to 3, using the following key:

1 = Very Important Goal

2 = Somewhat Important Goal

3 = Not Important Goal For Me

\_\_\_1. Decrease my reliance on pain medications (especially opioids such as codeine & Vicodin).

\_\_\_2. Improve my general physical condition through physical reconditioning exercises and/or weight management.

\_\_\_3. Learn how to better self-manage my daily physical activities without overdoing it or doing too little.

\_\_\_4. Find more ways to distract my mind away from focusing on pain and other negative thoughts.

\_\_\_5. Find more effective and constructive ways of managing episodes of intense pain.

\_\_\_6. Learn how to cope more effectively with feelings of tension, worry, anxiety, frustration, irritability or anger.

\_\_\_7. Learn how to cope more effectively with feelings of sadness, depression, discouragement, or guilt.

\_\_\_8. Improve my day to day relationships with family and friends.

\_\_\_9. Find more healthy and constructive ways of spending my time so that I have a good balance between social/ recreational activities and work-like activities.

\_\_\_10. Find employment that is compatible with my physical capabilities.

### **Personal Self-Management Goals**

Using the preceding exercise as a start, you can begin developing your own list of self-management goals using the following worksheet. You may want to think about establishing goals in the following general areas: use of pain medications, physical exercise, daily physical activities, emotional reactions, managing stress, family and friends, recreational activities, and work.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

### **Guidelines for Establishing Goals**

Ideally your goals should follow the **SMART** guidelines as recommended in the Mayo Clinic on Pain book. This means that your goals should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**rackable.

**Specific.** You need to think of what it is you want to accomplish, how you are going to it, and when do you hope to achieve it. It is recommended that you break large goals into a series of smaller steps that can be accomplished on a daily or weekly basis.

**Measurable.** This means that there should be some means of determining whether or when you've achieved the goal. "Getting in better shape" is not a good goal because it is too vague and difficult to measure. A better goal might be something like doing 20 minutes of stretching exercises each day.

**Attainable.** The goals you choose should be potentially attainable. Even though you might like to return to a previous physically demanding job or recreational activity, this may not be attainable if you have significant physical limitations as a result of your pain condition. Thus your goals may have to be more modest than you would like ideally.

**Realistic.** You need to consider if the goal is realistic. Although many chronic pain patients would like to completely get rid of their pain once and for all, this may not be a realistic goal. Finding additional pain diversionary activities may be more realistic and achievable.

**Trackable.** This means that you are able to track your progress in reaching a particular goal. For example, you may choose the goal of losing a particular amount of weight and then keep a weekly record of changes in your weight.

For each goal listed, you may want to state the goal itself, when you want to achieve it, how you are going to go about reaching the goal, and how you are going to measure your progress. Following is an example:

**Goal:** Learn how to release tension through relaxation training exercises

**When I want to achieve it:** 6 weeks

**How I want to achieve it:** Spend 15 to 20 minutes each morning listening to one of my Hypnotic CDs

**How I am going to measure it:** Maintain a relaxation practice log noting the date, time of day I listened to the tape and my tension level before and after I do the exercise

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