

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Multi-disciplinary Treatment for Chronic Low Back Pain

Name: Sean Pietrini, MS4

Plain Language Summary:

Low back pain is chronic when it has lasted longer than 6 months. Chronic low back pain is one of the most common reasons for someone to visit the doctor. Almost everyone will have this kind of pain at some time in their life.

Most of the time, a single cause of the pain cannot be found. Someone may have been doing many things improperly, like standing or lifting, for a long time. Then suddenly, one simple movement leads to pain. Many people with chronic back pain have arthritis. This puts extra wear and tear on the spine. It may be due to heavy use from work or sports, past injuries, or past surgery. In general, people are at greater risk for low back pain if they are over age 30, overweight, or pregnant. It also occurs more in people who do not exercise, feel stressed or depressed, smoke, and have a job in which they have to do a lot of heavy lifting. In many countries, low back pain is the most common cause of long term disability in middle-aged people

There are many ways to treat low back pain. Sometimes, no single type of treatment works very well by itself. Because of this, some doctors recommend something called multi-disciplinary bio-psycho-social rehabilitation (MBPSR) programs. This type of treatment is based on the fact that chronic low back pain can lead to a combination of physical, psychological, and social impairments. For that reason, doctors use MBPSR to tackle the problem of low back pain in not just one, but many ways. The types of treatment involved in MBPSR include pain medication, counseling, patient education, physical therapy, and occupational therapy. (Occupational therapy is available at your primary doctor's clinic or in pain clinics and rehabilitation centers across the country.

Many research studies have looked at the effectiveness of MBPSR as a treatment for low back pain. Together, these studies show that intense MBPSR helps get rid of some of the back pain patients feel. It also helps them cope with their back pain so they can return to normal activities. However, it is not clear if MBPSR improves job performance for people with low back pain. In addition, MBPSR can be expensive. This is because it requires a lot of different healthcare professionals to work together. More research has to be done to see if MBPSR is a practical option for most patients.

For more information:

Low Back Pain Fact Sheet: National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/backpain/detail_backpain.htm

MedicineNet.com:
http://www.medicinenet.com/low_back_pain/article.htm

Lower Back Pain Toolkit

<http://www.lower-back-pain-toolkit.com/biopsychosocial-model.html>

Graham Rehabilitation and Wellness Center

<http://www.grahamrehab.com/>

Key Words:

Lower back pain

Chronic

Bio-psycho-social

Multidisciplinary

Rehabilitation

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