Integrative Medicine and Chronic Pain

By Eric Lenko, MD

or all the high-tech triumphs in medicine, the most effective treatment for chronic pain is still lower surgery to biomechanically correct the source of pain. Even then, the cure may not go well, and clinical evidence frequently suggests that new approaches are needed. That's the main lesson taught by the American Pain Society (APS) at its 1996 meeting, where it was pointed out that treatments for chronic pain can no longer be considered simply as a pain-relieving measure, but must also address the underlying causes of the pain. This is because chronic pain is a complex condition that involves both the body and the mind.

The Limits of the Medical Model
It's estimated that over 50 million Americans meet the criteria for chronic pain, and this number is expected to rise to 100 million by the late 1990s. This means that over 15 billion dollars will be spent annually on medical and surgical treatments, and yet our understanding of the medical model and its limits has significantly increased. Countless surgical and non-surgical procedures have been attempted, but few have been successful. In fact, the treatment of chronic pain is often viewed by healthcare providers as a failure, leading to frustration and despair.

Pain Management (continued from previous page)

As more patients turn to integrative solutions, the lack of efficacy of the medical model is becoming apparent. The new focus is on pain management, and the scope of treatment has expanded to include lifestyle changes, exercise, and even mind-body therapies.

The Spectrum of Clinical Roles
Depending on the background and training of the healthcare provider, the spectrum of clinical roles can vary. In some cases, CAM interventions may be practiced by different providers, while in others, CAM interventions may be practiced by different providers, depending on the specific needs of the patient. This list includes the following:

1. Occupational Therapy
2. Physical Therapy
3. Massage Therapy
4. Acupuncture
5. Chiropractic
6. Psychotherapy
7. Nutrition
8. Yoga and other mind-body therapies

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy focuses on helping individuals with physical disabilities or emotional problems develop the skills they need to live independently. It emphasizes the use of movement, exercise, and stress reduction techniques to improve function and reduce pain.

Physical Therapy

Physical therapy is focused on helping individuals with chronic pain develop the skills they need to function independently. It emphasizes the use of movement, exercise, and stress reduction techniques to improve function and reduce pain.

An Integrative Approach

An integrative approach to pain management focuses on treating the whole person, not just the pain. This approach recognizes that pain is a subjective experience, and that pain is influenced by many factors, including physical, emotional, and social factors. An integrative approach to pain management is based on the belief that pain is a complex problem that requires a multidisciplinary approach.

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