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Mechanisms of an Occupation-based Approach for Persons with Chronic Pain and Work Loss

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INTRODUCTION

Current literature demonstrates a significant investigation of chronic pain. The actual mechanisms that promote adaptation, accommodation, and change, however, are not explicated in the current literature on chronic pain.

Our goal was to conduct a mini realist synthesis approach in current literature to identify mechanisms critical to promote return to work (RTW) for persons with chronic pain.

Specifically, we sought to identify if the mechanisms of these programs are consistent with an occupation-based approach used in Occupational Therapy (OT).

STUDY DESIGN AND RESULTS

A realist synthesis approach aims to answer the question: "WHAT is it about this kind of intervention that works, for WHOM, in what CIRCUMSTANCES, in what RESPECTS and WHY?" (Pawson et al., 2005).

A 5 step realist synthesis template identified by Pawson et al. (2005) guided the review process:

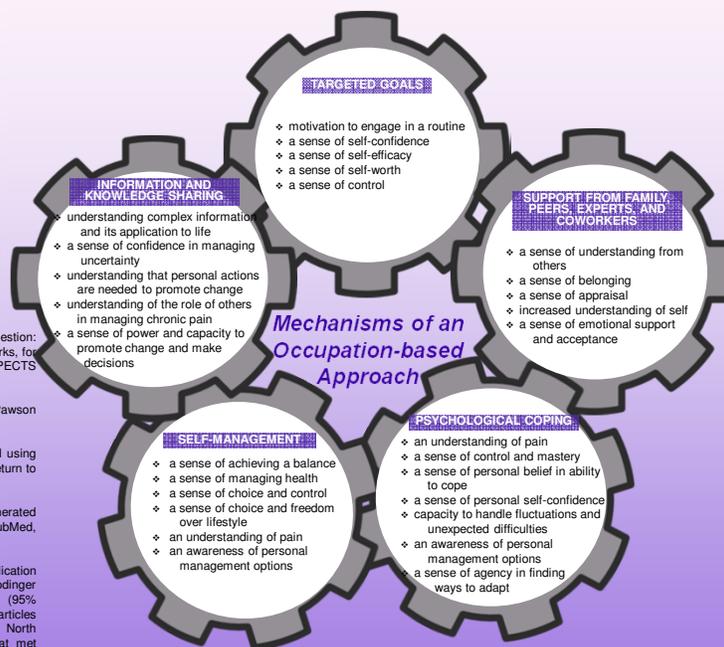
1. *Clarify scope:* the literature base was searched using the terms chronic pain, pain, return to work, and return to work programs.

2. *Search for the evidence:* 257 articles were generated from a search across 6 databases (CINAHL, PubMed, PsycInfo, Sociological Abstracts, CBCA, CPI.Q).

3. *Appraise primary studies and extract data:* application of a modified relevancy criteria, developed by Prodinge & Magalhães (2010), generated 38 articles (95% quantitative and 5% qualitative studies; 47% of articles from countries on the European continent, 45% North America, 2% Asia, 2% Oceania, 4% Other) that met relevancy criteria. An Excel chart was developed to extract data on a realm of mechanisms that were appraised as part of this study.

4. *Synthesize evidence and draw conclusions:* data on program components was analyzed to identify mechanisms and key components of change in chronic pain RTW programs.

5. *Disseminate, implement and evaluate:* this poster is the first step in dissemination, to encourage policy makers and therapists to implement the mechanisms found in this synthesis into chronic pain programs.



DEFINING AN OCCUPATION-BASED APPROACH:

We defined an occupation-based approach as an intervention that emphasizes occupational engagement in activities and tasks of everyday and work life which possess specific meaning and importance to the individual, imparts structure onto life, enables the person to develop and increase their occupational capacities, and results in increased satisfaction, meaning, purpose and a strengthened sense of identity, health and well-being through occupational engagement.

CONCLUSIONS

Policy Implications: Evidence suggests that effective chronic pain programs can be achieved through incorporating, at minimum, these 5 key mechanisms.

Implications for practice in OT: This study found that approximately 90% of chronic pain programs are clinic based, and not directed in the workplace. For OT, more emphasis on programs that transition into the workplace and address the needs of persons to manage at home are essential for promoting and sustaining change.

Research Implications: Programs that adopt these five mechanisms need to be evaluated for their effectiveness in improving the capacity of the individual to cope, to live a higher quality of life and to participate in meaningful work. In addition, further research is indicated on other mechanisms that are consistent with an occupation based approach but are not part of current programming, such as accommodation and focus on work identity.

Implications for interdisciplinary practice: These mechanisms require a complex approach to chronic pain management and necessitate an interdisciplinary approach. Opportunities to implement programs for success and effectiveness need to reconsider current program mechanisms and incorporate new mechanisms to promote change at the level of the person, workplace and home environment.

REFERENCES

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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