

## **INFORMATION SHEET FOR CLIENTS REFERRED FOR A PAIN MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

### **Why have I been referred to a Clinical Psychologist?**

You were referred to us because you may benefit from learning some pain management techniques that have been proven to be helpful for many other people experiencing persisting pain. This does not mean that the person that referred you believes you're crazy or that your pain is not real. In fact, if they have referred you here it is probably because they recognise the difficulties that persisting (or chronic) pain can cause and they want to help you to have a better life.

Clinical Psychologists are able to assist people who have a variety of medical problems, including diabetes, cancer and rheumatoid arthritis. Unfortunately medical science is still at a stage where it cannot cure many of the conditions that afflict people. Sometimes people experience pain that doctors aren't able to cure. You have probably received some medical treatments already, which may have caused additional problems (e.g. medication side effects) or have not fully eliminated the pain. So, it's going to be important to learn how to improve your quality of your life despite the pain, which will minimise the negative effects that it has had on your daily life, mood and relationships. Just as a diabetic can improve his or her quality of life by learning some simple techniques to manage the diabetes, so too can people with persisting pain benefit from learning some useful strategies to manage the pain. It is for this reason that you have been referred to us.

The Clinical Psychologist will provide guidance and will teach you some useful techniques, but the amount that you benefit will depend upon how much you practice the strategies in your every day life. This is similar to if you see a dietician: you would not lose weight (in this case: better manage pain) merely by going to the appointments. Instead, you would need to alter your eating habits (in this case: ways of responding to pain) in order to receive the benefits.

### **How many sessions will I need to attend?**

The number of sessions required varies from person to person. It is partly dependent on how you are coping at the moment, what goals you are trying to achieve, and how quickly you begin to apply the strategies that we discuss during the sessions. Most people with persisting pain can gain significant benefits from attending as few as 10 sessions; however some people need a few more and some a few less. We will have a better idea of this after you start your program.

### **What can we offer me that is different to other treatments?**

Clinical Psychologists are different from Psychiatrists, Counsellors, Social Workers and even other types of Psychologists. We specialise in assessment, diagnosis and treatment of a range of problems, including persisting pain. It is important that you understand that Clinical Psychologists do not prescribe medication, and we don't just provide counselling (or listening and talking to people). Our approach (CBT, as outlined

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below) is an active one that can help you to bring about real and lasting changes in your life, so that you can achieve your goals, both now and in the future.

If you'd like further information about the difference between Clinical Psychologists and Psychiatrists you could look at the Australian Psychological Society website, follow this link: <http://www.psychology.org.au/psych/psychiatrist/default.asp>

### **Who will have access to information about me?**

If you have a Worker's Compensation claim you probably have a number of professionals working together to assist you. This might include your treating doctor, rehabilitation provider, physiotherapist and insurance company. It is important that all of these people work together so that you get the best treatment possible. In order for us to do that we will be communicating through reports (which will update the involved parties about your progress), as well as phone calls, and at times through face-to-face meetings.

### **Why have I been sent questionnaires to complete?**

The questionnaires have been carefully chosen to provide valuable information about how you are coping with the pain and how it has affected your life. Gathering information in this way allows us to better utilise the time we have face-to-face during the assessment session and will assist us in planning treatment (if deemed necessary).

### **What will my treatment involve?**

The type of treatment that we provide is called **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)**. This type of treatment involves examining and then changing unhelpful thoughts, beliefs and behaviours that may be affecting your ability to manage your pain. This treatment will not provide a cure for your pain, but a way of coping *despite* the pain, aimed at minimising its effect on your life.

The psychologists at Dr. Sharp & Associates are all highly trained and experienced in the delivery of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). CBT is a relatively short-term, scientifically based therapeutic approach that is effective in achieving desired and meaningful changes.

CBT comprises both cognitive therapy and behaviour therapy. Cognitive therapy involves identifying and systematically evaluating the unhelpful thoughts (or cognitions) that lead to intense or frequent negative feelings (e.g. depression, anxiety) and result in unhelpful behaviours (e.g. avoiding friends). The treatment focuses on questioning thoughts and coming up with new more helpful ways to think about difficult situations.

Behaviour therapy is goal-oriented and aims to help people change unhealthy or unhelpful behaviours that cause them to suffer or lower their quality and enjoyment of life. For example, people who are depressed often enjoy fewer pleasurable activities and so your Psychologist would work with you to identify pleasurable activities and develop a plan to increase your participation in them.

Finally, CBT is focused on helping people like you to achieve your goals and to get more out of life. As well as helping you to change your unhelpful thinking and behaviour, CBT involves teaching you a range of useful and practical strategies to overcome the hurdles and obstacles in your life and to be happier and more productive.

### **What happens at the initial assessment session?**

Your Psychologist will ask you to sign a consent form indicating your understanding of the practice information and will explain the main issues associated with the privacy of your information. They will collect your questionnaires and score them after the assessment, giving you the results at your next session. The two main aims of the initial assessment session are to discuss the issues that have brought you to the session, and to outline how we think we can help you.

The first session will involve a thorough assessment of the impact of the pain on your life and how you are currently coping with it. The Clinical Psychologist will be trying to understand the difficulties that you are having in managing your pain, as well as things that you might be doing that are helpful and what you think might help you to improve further.

Each assessment session is individually tailored to suit your needs. Generally though, your Psychologist will ask you questions about your feelings, associated physical symptoms, thoughts that may have been bothering you, your family and medical history, your relationships, your activity level, and your goals and expectations for the program. At the end of the session there will be a brief discussion of the session plan and a chance for you to ask any questions of your Psychologist.

### **What do I do between sessions?**

CBT is an active skills-based approach, so you will have to put work into learning new strategies and ways of dealing with difficult life issues. To get the most out of the sessions you will need to commit some time outside the sessions to working on tasks that you and your Psychologist agree upon. About 1 hour per day is usually enough - depending on the issues that you are working on – although it is often the case that the more time you put in between sessions, the more you will get out of the program and the faster you will achieve its benefits. Tasks you may be asked to complete between sessions may include: keeping a thoughts diary, practising relaxation techniques, completing an activity that you were working on in a session, or reading some relevant chapters from a book.

### **How often will I attend sessions?**

Ideally you will attend on either a weekly or fortnightly basis initially. At the start of treatment sessions tend to be more frequent so that you can quickly make some positive changes and start to feel better. As you progress through the session plan, you might discuss meeting less frequently so that you have more time to put in place longer term changes and work towards your goals. Please note that if you are feeling very anxious or depressed you would usually benefit from more frequent sessions initially.

### **What will the sessions involve?**

The content of sessions will vary according to your specific needs, but will generally cover the following topics:

- giving you some information about the different types of pain
- helping you to work out what you would like to achieve during the treatment program (set goals), or things that you would like to change in your life
- teaching you about ways that you can do your activities to minimise the number of flare-ups (or increases in pain) that you experience and helping you to manage better if flare-ups do occur.
- Helping you replace distressing and unhelpful thoughts with more constructive and helpful ones

The sessions are structured so that you get the most out of them. A typical agenda for a 50-minute session follows:

Brief review of progress since last session (discuss how you have been feeling and any major events)	5 minutes
Review of tasks assigned during the last session (troubleshooting any difficulties in applying the strategies)	10 minutes
Skills component (e.g. learn how to question thoughts or practice relaxation techniques)	25 minutes
Set tasks and goals to be completed for review next session and arrange next appointment	10 minutes

As you can see, most of the time in sessions is devoted to learning and practising new skills and there is limited time for just “chatting”. We believe that clients get the most benefit out of sessions when they are active and learning a new skill, so just talking or ‘ventilating’ isn’t likely to be as beneficial. After all, if you want to just talk you can always talk to a friend or family member. Other therapeutic approaches such as counselling, don’t seek to actively help an individual change but rather offer support and an opportunity to talk about feelings. In general, scientific evidence suggests that these approaches tend not achieve very significant results even after many sessions.

### **What happens if I cancel or re-schedule a session?**

From time to time you may not be able to attend a session due to unforeseeable circumstances. However, if you regularly cancel or reschedule appointments it can be very disruptive to your program and you may not achieve your goals if you are attending sessions infrequently or sporadically. Regular and consistent attendance ensures that you make the most of your program and reach your goals sooner. If you regularly cancel or re-schedule appointments your Psychologist will discuss this issue with you in your sessions so that you can work out a solution. The insurer will be billed for all cancelled sessions with less than 4 days notice. After a cancellation we will notify the insurer and others involved of your non-attendance. Before we can schedule another appointment we will need to get approval to proceed from the insurer. This may cause a delay in your treatment so it is best to avoid cancelling any appointments.

### **What is the Chronic Pain Model?**

The Model is a summary put together by your Psychologist of the main issues that were discussed in the initial assessment. It is important that you both have a shared understanding of what the issues are, how they have arisen, and what might be maintaining these difficulties, as well as identifying your strengths that will help you to overcome your difficulties. This is your chance to clarify any issues or add any information that you may think is relevant. It also allows your Psychologist to ask any further questions and fill in any gaps in their understanding of your situation. When you have finished treatment, it can be helpful to review the formulation and see how far you have progressed and how your situation has changed over time.

### **What is the Session Plan?**

Your Psychologist will develop a draft session plan based on the formulation as well as the information gathered throughout the assessment process (including information from the first interview and the questionnaires that you completed). The outlines in sequence the steps that your psychologist believes you will need to take to make positive life changes. This allows you both to have a clear plan and sense of direction for treatment. It is important that you work collaboratively with your psychologist and agree upon the skills and strategies that will be most beneficial to you and in which order you should proceed.

Sometimes it makes sense to learn certain new skills before others. For example, usually education about the psychological aspects of the issues that you face will come first. Also, the final session usually focuses on developing a setback plan for managing flare-ups, which involves reviewing all of the skills you have learnt in treatment and analysing the progress that you have made in order to maintain the gains in the future and to increase your confidence in dealing with future setbacks. However, the plan is not set in stone and you may decide with your Psychologist to change the order, add or eliminate items as treatment progresses according to your progress, individual needs, and changes in life circumstances.

### **How will my progress be reviewed?**

As you progress through treatment, you will have some thoughts and feelings about how the sessions are progressing. Your Psychologist will ask you about how you are finding the sessions at regular intervals. It is very important that you feel free to raise any questions or concerns as soon as they arise. Your Psychologist will work with you to resolve any concerns you may have. As part of this process, you may need to consider your expectations of treatment. Problems that have been long standing will not disappear overnight and may take several months (or even years) to resolve. Also, no matter how hard you try, everyone will still experience some periods of sadness, anxiety or other negative feelings in their life and it would be unrealistic to aim to never feel sad or anxious again as these are normal emotions. However, if you feel you are not progressing as quickly as you would like, please discuss your concerns with your Psychologist so that you can work out a plan together to improve the situation.

### **What happens at the end of the program?**

In your second last session, your Psychologist will ask you to fill in the questionnaires that you completed at the start of the program and to bring them to your final session. At the final session you will be given feedback about the changes that you have made and the questionnaire results.

### **Do you want to know more?**

Your Clinical Psychologist will do their best to answer any other questions you might have. Also, please feel free to have a look at our website ([www.makingchanges.com.au](http://www.makingchanges.com.au)) which has a lot more information that you might find useful.