



PAIN AND *Relationships*

BY ADVANCED PAIN MANAGEMENT

Test after test, doctor after doctor, and still no relief. Those with chronic pain know the cycle well. This seemingly never-ending search for relief from chronic pain can breed frustration, anger, and even outright depression. It can also strain one of the most important things in life: relationships. But, just like with every other aspect of pain, it's all a matter of finding the right treatment.

Relationship Stressors

According to Advanced Pain Management licensed psychologist Mary Papandria, "Oftentimes, the pain patient becomes fixated on their pain. That's all they talk about, think about, focus on. Their world becomes smaller and smaller ... [and] they have little time or attention for other people in their lives." As a result, their loved ones can feel neglected and unimportant.

According to a *Journal of Pain* review, as pain sufferers become more isolated from those they love, and more psychosocially impaired in general, spouses can become less satisfied and begin to view their marriage as maladjusted.

Changing Roles

As the book *Relieving Pain in America* by the Institute of Medicine of the

National Academies puts it, “Family members find that ... they must take on new roles (as caregiver and morale booster) and greater responsibilities in the family (e.g., grocery shopping, chores, errands), [and] the burden on them increases.”

These extra responsibilities, oftentimes incredibly overwhelming, can create a sense of resentment toward the pain sufferer, like he or she is using their pain as an excuse. And the individual in pain can often feel like a burden on their partner.

“Furthermore,” says Papandria, “who the pain patient was before the pain may have disappeared. They aren’t themselves anymore, and the spouse may feel that they don’t know them anymore.”

The Effects of Relationship Discord

All of these factors can create tension, frustration, and anger as well as consequences beyond a relationship. For instance, husbands of patients with chronic pain, compared to those married to women without pain, report loneliness, high stress levels, low activity levels, and fatigue in addition to a decline in marital satisfaction.

But more than that, relationship turmoil can have an impact on pain levels and the effectiveness of treatment. In a study from the journal *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, one year after completing a pain program, those with nonsupportive families relied more on pain medications and reported having more pain sites, while those with supportive families had less pain intensity and greater activity levels.

Papandria says the negative emotions, depression, and anxiety that oftentimes accompany pain and strained relationships can “all result in a worsened perception of pain, increased disability, and lessened benefits from treatment. ... People tend to be pessimistic. They focus on what’s wrong versus what’s right. As a result, they

tend to view treatments as not being effective and see their pain as worse.” Their negative emotional state could also lead them to focus too heavily on their pain, causing them to take notice of every twinge and spasm, and making them think treatments aren’t helping.

A Multimodal Solution

Since pain, emotions, and relationships are inextricably linked, to effectively treat one aspect you have to treat them all. That’s where a multimodal approach comes in.

Treating the pain sooner rather than later through pain clinics, which now offer so many nonopioid treatments, helps to improve pain and emotions. “If patients have better pain control, then they are going to be less depressed/anxious and less apt to isolate,” says Papandria. “They will also be less focused on the pain and will have the energy and attention to attend to other things and people.”

And by addressing emotional issues and strained relationships, individuals can achieve better treatment outcomes while simultaneously learning how to communicate their fears and needs, how to identify harmful thought patterns, how to set achievable goals, and how to cope with the changing roles that pain has brought to their lives. Through treatment, the fulfilling life that has seemed so elusive may once again be within reach.

Photograph provided by Advanced Pain Management.

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CHIROPRACTIC CARE

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CHRONIC CONDITIONS & SUPPORT

Listings include various national, state, and local resources. See also the Palliative Care category in this section.

ADVANCED PAIN MANAGEMENT

APM Appleton Clinic

1616 N. Casaloma Dr., Ste. 100
Appleton 54913

APM Green Bay Clinic

2595 Development Dr., Ste. 150
Green Bay 54311

APM Oconto Falls Clinic

853 S. Main St., Oconto Falls 54154

APM Fond du Lac Clinic

210 Wisconsin American Dr.
Fond du Lac 54935

APM Manitowoc Clinic

1 E. Waldo Blvd., Ste. 2
Manitowoc 54220

APM Sheboygan Clinic

2124 Kohler Memorial Dr.
Sheboygan 53081

(888) 901-7246

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Advanced Pain Management is a chronic pain center with convenient locations throughout Wisconsin. Committed to providing patients the most advanced, minimally invasive diagnostic and therapeutic services to enable you to restore function, relieve pain, and renew hope. No referral needed.

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