

## Chronic Pain Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Group at The AIMS Institute

One of the great challenges in any medical care setting is the management of chronic pain. Estimates from the 2012 National Health Interview Study indicate a significant amount of adults in the United States report daily pain. At The AIMS Institute we encounter this challenge daily. As a country, we have come to rely on prescription, opioid-based medications to respond to chronic pain. Studies show, however, that long-term opioid use in the treatment of chronic pain is associated with sleep disturbance, respiratory and cardiovascular complications, gastrointestinal problems as well as the increasing prevalence of opioid addiction and overdose, which has become the leading cause of accidental death in the United States.

AIMS Institute treatment protocol for our patients is to use more than one approach to treating chronic pain. Included in this multimodality approach is the Cognitive Therapy for Chronic Pain group, offered over 10 weeks. This group is on Thursday evenings from 6pm-7pm at our Eastlake office. The group is led by an AIMS Institute psychotherapist, with participation from multi-disciplinary staff. Upon referral, AIMS Institute psychotherapy staff work with each individual patient, addressing barriers such as assessing for program appropriateness, and setting positive expectations for participation. With a focus on behavioral activation and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, participants learn self-care skills such as meditation, guided imagery, assertiveness training, mindfulness, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation techniques and positive self talk. These evidence-based modalities improve pain management outcomes and also address secondary diagnoses, such as Major Depressive Disorder and Anxiety. Patients are coached on communicating with their medical team regarding symptoms and preferences for treatment. The psychotherapist works with patients to set measurable, attainable goals for behavior change at the start of each session, and revisit goals throughout the course. Participation in the group also provides socialization and peer support for patients, many of whom have become isolated by pain, mood, and/or mobility challenges.

An associated benefit of participation in The AIMS Institute pain management group is patient access to all on-site services. AIMS offers IV therapy, SMJ cannabis consulting, ketamine-assisted psychotherapy services, and naturopathic medicine consultations, which are also provided weekly at AIMS Institute. These services can be purchased in addition to the pain management group and may be continued for additional sessions after group completion.

For Integrative Care Practitioners and patients, AIMS Institute's various chronic pain interventions provide an important alternative to long-term medication use. These groups are likely to be more effective than opioids for treating chronic pain because not only do they empower patients to care for themselves in a pro- active manner, but they also help patients build community which is often difficult when faced with chronic pain and medical issues.

Patients will discover the impact of coaching on communicating with providers, addressing negative self-talk, and the benefits of tools such as breathing and relaxation skills. Patients can enjoy greater satisfaction in their relationship with their medical providers, improved self-worth, and more effective sleep. Utilizing pre- and post- intervention function and pain assessment tools, as well as the PHQ9,

patient progress, symptom distress, and skill development can be tracked and used to demonstrate group efficacy.

As the treatment of chronic pain in Washington State and nationwide revamps to move away from an over-reliance on opioid pain medications to consideration of alternative means of addressing chronic pain, specialty care clinics must comply. The provision of groups and alternative pain interventions will be key to both patient and provider success. AIMS Institute looks forward to continued service growth and innovation that includes pain management services for our patients.

If you have questions, please contact April Mullen, MA, LMHC at The AIMS Institute (206)-420-1321.

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