Alternatives to Opioids

Howard L. Bost Forum 2018

Mel Pohl, MD, DFASAM
Chief Medical Officer
Las Vegas Recovery Center
Bio-psycho-social-spiritual Treatment Model for Pain, Addiction and Mental Health

Sustained happy recovery
Ways to reduce pain intensity

• Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).
• Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT).
• Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).
• Complementary/Alternative therapies.
• Motivational Interviewing.
• Mindfulness Practice.
“I’m learning how to relax, doctor — but I want to relax better and faster! I want to be on the cutting edge of relaxation!”
Mindfulness Practice

- Willful directed attention to present moment without judgment.
- Daily practice – like tuning an instrument.
- Meta-cognitive process (vs CBT).
- Change our relationship with our thoughts without changing the thoughts themselves.
- Detach from thoughts, feelings and physical sensations. (attachment = suffering) - Observer or spectator of thoughts.
Mindfulness Practice

Bizarro  Dan Piraro

What do we want?! Mindfulness!

When do we want it?! NOW!
Mindfulness Practice

• Focus on an object - usually the breath.
• Thoughts ebb and flow (like bubbles).
• Bring attention back to the breath (training a puppy).
• No effort to clear thoughts or push away negatives or hold positives.
• Cravings and urges are a desire for things to be different than they are (e.g. pain-free).
• No “good” meditation – no outcome.
The Effects of Mindfulness Meditation on Chronic Pain

• Changes the brain – neuroplasticity.
• Enriches the brain’s neuronal structures:
  - Enhances connections.
  - Affects neurotransmitter levels:
    - decreased cortisol & epinephrine (stimulation).
    - increased serotonin & GABA (relaxation, antidepressant).

After 3 months of daily meditation in 27 older adults (>65):
  - Less pain
  - Improved attention
  - Enhanced well-being
  - Improved quality of life

Mindfulness Research

- 4 days of mindfulness training:
  - Decreased pain unpleasantness by 50%.
  - Increased Anterior Cingulate Cortex and Anterior Insula = cognitive regulation of nociception.
  - Thalamic deactivation.
  - Decreased activation of contralateral SE Cortex.
  - “I feel the pain but I’m not as upset about it. I’m able to let it go.”
  

- 342 adults – 8 week training in MBSR – 43% meaningful reduction in pain – vs 26% usual care.
  
Mindfulness Research

- After 8 weeks of 27 minutes practice per day – increased gray matter:
  - Increased posterior cingulate – mind wandering and self-relevance.
  - Increased temporo-parietal junction – perspective taking, empathy, & compassion.
  - Increased L. hippocampus – learning, cognition and emotional regulation.
  - Increased insular cortex – better pain tolerance.
  - Decreased amygdala – decreased anxiety, fear and stress.

Lazar Neuroreport 2005.
Body Scan

• Burmese practice called sweeping.
• Jon Kabat Zinn, Ph.D.
• “Self Cat Scan”.
• Observer’s attitude – bearing witness to the pain – awareness of the pain is not the pain.
• Utilize Compassion and kindness towards self.
Research confirms that drugs give the same benefits as yoga !!!
Halasana
Excellent for back pain and insomnia.
Balasana
Position that brings the sensation of peace and calm.
Savasana
Position of total relaxation.
THANK YOU

Mel Pohl, MD, DFASAM
702-271-1734
mpohl@centralrecovery.com
Drmelpohl.com