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years she has run a busy studio and treatment clinic in Kilmacanogue, Co Wicklow. She is a TMS Health Practitioner, writer, editor and researcher (UCC Neuroscience Dept).

Engaging Patients in Resolving Chronic Pain

On Sunday 10th April Chronic Pain Ireland held it's Annual General Meeting for 2016, it was my privilege to be invited to speak and to meet some CPI members. Thank you for making me feel so welcome, everyone was so warm and friendly.

'Engaging patients in resolving chronic pain' is an approach that has been developed within many disciplines and over many years. It is about healing unexplainable pain, when medical investigations fail to find anything wrong.

The beginning

My identical twin brothers are older than me and I must have been a pretty annoying little sister. I always wanted to join in with whatever they happened to be up to, they were not so keen about this and I was often forcefully deterred! However, when I was brave enough to use it, I had an unusual power, I could identify my identical twin brothers, whereas no one else could. In her innocence my mother knitted them colour-coded jumpers every Christmas, blue and black for one and brown and orange for the other. I still wonder, did she really not know that they swapped them around? As a little girl I instinctively knew who they were from behind, by their gait and posture. It seemed to me that the way they each walked was very distinctive. I am grateful to my brothers for my initial interest in movement.

For several years I lectured in the Theatre Studies department of Lancaster University as a movement specialist. I went on to work at two other universities in the UK lecturing in movement, psychology and non-verbal communication, in addition to teaching post graduates at London Contemporary Dance.

In each institution colleagues commented that students who had eating disorders or anxiety, tended to improve while attending my courses. Often this was anecdotally attributed to my training in Laban technique and Body Mind Centering. In 2013 research by psychologist Jill Allen and her colleagues confirmed that body awareness and confidence liberated women from restrained eating¹. It appears that in general we may underestimate the impact

body awareness and posture may have on how we feel. When I began to teach Body Centering Pilates in County Wicklow I puzzled over the remarkable recoveries made by women who had pregnancy related pelvic girdle pain. Their obstetricians were delighted and continued to refer such patients to me, the recovery rate is still exceptional. However when this first began I was perplexed. What was it that evoked such a miracle cure? Low back pain patients referred to me also invariably reported a significant reduction in their pain quite rapidly. And so began my quest to explain the link between body movement awareness and pain resolution.

Unexplained Pain

Over the past fourteen years I have trained and worked with some of the most dedicated Doctors, Psychotherapists and Surgeons to understand why the patients I teach recover from pain so well. It seems that through my expertise in movement and psychology I stumbled into the world of unexplained pain and in particular unexplained chronic pain.

Is our experience of pain affected by neural pathways?

Unexplained pain can be caused by an imbalance in the autonomic nervous system. It is a physiological response; in effect it is an overload of the stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol, which can increase anxiety and fuel pain. Acute physical pain requires the nervous system to be in the relaxation response to initiate the body's natural healing processes. Simply put, if the stress response is dominant then the body can't heal itself.

Unpleasant physical and mental stimuli might produce a physiological response of stress hormones through the nervous system. Understanding the sequence of these events and the role of the unconscious mind is important to implement an effective treatment plan for chronic pain. If the stress hormones return to a normal level, the nervous system could be said to "calm down". This restoration of balance can resolve many symptoms. Therefore, an overload of adrenaline and cortisol can be responsible for chronic pain, and it can also exacerbate chronic pain. Calming down the nervous system is an effective treatment as it re-routes the neurological pathways. Various research papers, neurological evidence and many case studies suggest unexplained chronic pain can be solved by re balancing the nervous system^u.

Neuro Physiologic Disorder (NPD) occurs when the stress response of your autonomic nervous system is out of balance. That is, your body is over reactive to the environment, or the environment is over-stimulating your body. Our physiology is in a delicate balance and constantly adjusts itself to maintain balance in all our systems. What is now apparent is that our thoughts can disrupt^u that balance as can how we hold our body. Amy Cuddy a social psychologist who studies non-verbal behaviour has researched the effects of both powerless and powerful poses^v. The results were unequivocal, powerless poses inflicted anxiety and self-doubt, while powerful poses inspired confidence and self-belief^v.

In the past there has been some misunderstanding about pain that cannot be explained. Unexplained pain it is now recognized as a diagnosis in its own right. There are several different acronyms in use, they all mean something slightly different. You may have heard of Tension Myoneural Syndrome (TMS) which was the subject of a Royal Society of Medicine conference^{vi} in London in April 2015 attended by CPI Chair John Lindsay.

John Sarno MD

Dr John Sarno has worked in this area for over 40 years and has written several books about Tension Myoneural Syndrome (TMS), essentially his term for NPD, although there are some differences. **Healing Back Pain and Mind over Back Pain** are two of his most popular books. Now in his nineties, he retired a few years ago. John Sarno's work and his books are an important resource and have helped many patients. Columbia University in New York paid tribute to John Sarno's work in January this year at a conference entitled 'Healing Unexplained Pain'. During his ground-breaking career, John Sarno initially saw patients individually, but as his reputation grew, he frequently gave lectures to small groups of chronic pain patients. He found a lecture environment to be an effective way to explain that the unconscious mind can affect real pain in the body which may have been inaccurately attributed to a structural issue. John Sarno was well aware of the debilitating impact chronic pain can have. He often examined such patients on an individual basis then invited them to attend one of his informal lectures. Teaching a group of patients enabled him

to answer questions and help patients understand the concept of real physical pain as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience.^{vii} With a gentle smile, he has been known to say "knowledge, is my prescription". He understood that attaining this knowledge would be a long process for some patients and might be met with resistance, as society has conditioned us to hand over responsibility for 'mending' our bodies to those with medical expertise. We want our health practitioners to provide us with an instantaneous and convenient answer that will render us pain free, whether by medication or intervention.

Modern scientific medicine, for all its achievements, has never been so unsure of itself. We are now in a late period of doubt and uncertainty. Medicine has slowly, almost imperceptibly, been transformed from a profession into a service industry.^{viii}

John Sarno was a pioneer, his approach made sense to his patients. He educated patients to help them reduce or eliminate their pain. Rarely, patients can reduce their pain just by reading his book. Patients who have contacted me through TMS Wiki sometimes find this a bit intimidating, but it is normal to understand the basic principles from reading and then to work with a practitioner to put those principles into practice. TMS wiki serves both patients and professionals. Patients can use it to find a specialist to work with and it is a professional forum for practitioners to exchange ideas, research studies and pick each other's brains. If you are a pain patient using TMS Wiki, a practitioner can help you to ascertain if you have a TMS

diagnosis and how you might approach your symptoms. Many of the TMS approved health practitioners have gone on to develop John Sarno's work and other health practitioners have come to it from a different route.

Neuro Physiologic Disorder (NPD) is a refinement of TMS acknowledging recent research in Neuroscience. Another such refinement is Psycho Physiologic Disorder (PPD) which emphasizes the mind-body connection. My work encompasses the above and the connection between body and mind. Gentle reintroduction of body awareness, flexibility and trust in our bodies can initiate the resolution of chronic pain. A woman wrote to me recently: *'It's so liberating to be able to rely on my body again'*. In 12 weekly sessions she came off her pain medication altogether, having initially tapered it to 50%. The way she talks about her pain has changed, her behaviour has changed and her attitude to her body has changed. Not only has her pain reduced^x, with a 38% increase in functional movement and pain reduction, she has also started running.

If you'd like to increase your body awareness you can start by walking, aim to walk 100 steps per minute, with a goal of 1,000 steps in 10 minutes. Outside in the fresh air is best if you can, but up and down the hall at home is fine too. The key is positive body awareness. You might even try the odd power pose!

References on Request