



# INSIGHTS

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP, ARTICLES, CASE STUDIES & MORE

BY: MEDICAL & LIFE CARE CONSULTING

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## WHAT ABOUT PAIN?

### UNDERSTAND PAIN AND OPTIONS FOR MANAGING PAIN WITHIN WORKERS' COMPENSATION CLAIMS

Each year millions of claims are submitted by workers who may have suffered a work-related injury or illness. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 2.8 million nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses reported by private injury employers in 2019 alone. Of that figure, 888,220 nonfatal injuries and illnesses caused a private industry worker to miss at least one day of work, with 80% of injuries or illnesses being sprains, strains, tears, soreness, bruises, contusions, cuts, lacerations, punctures, and fractures – all, very likely, causing some degree of pain.<sup>[i]</sup> Ten to twenty percent of individuals who enter the workers' compensation system due to physical trauma develop chronic pain from either the severity of the initial injury or the injury's progression.<sup>[ii]</sup> Chronic pain, one of the most common reasons adults seek medical care, has been linked to restrictions in mobility and daily

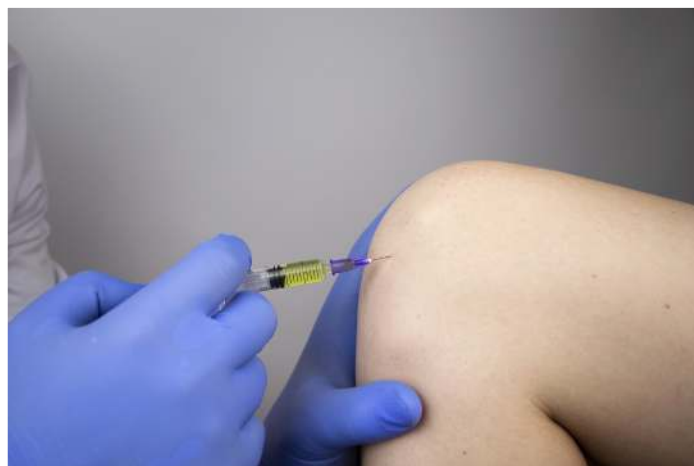
## ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTS

- INTERVENTIONAL PAIN PROCEDURES
- MEDICATION MANAGEMENT
- PHYSICAL THERAPY OR CHIROPRACTIC THERAPY
- PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AND SUPPORT
- ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

activities, dependence on opioids, anxiety and depression, and poor perceived health or reduced quality of life.<sup>[iii]</sup> This month's **INSIGHTS** article explores pain, including pain management options, and how they may be used during an individual's workers' compensation rehabilitation.

The experience of pain from one individual to another is entirely unique. As one may imagine, pain is subjective and intertwined with two complementary aspects: a feeling of pain in a particular part of the body, and the other, an attempt to relieve or terminate the pain.<sup>[iv]</sup> Determining the best options for treating a worker's pain is guided by understanding the source and history of the pain, the intensity, the duration, aggravating and relieving conditions, and the structures, or parts of the body, involved in causing the pain. Pain management is aimed at identifying the source of the problem and defining the optimal plan of treatment.<sup>[v]</sup>

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## **OPTIONS FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT INCLUDE:**

- **Interventional procedures**
- **Medication management**
- **Physical therapy or chiropractic therapy**
- **Psychological counseling and support**
- **Alternative therapies**
- **Referral to pain management specialists<sup>[vi]</sup>**

## **INTERVENTIONAL PAIN PROCEDURES**

Interventional pain management aims to relieve, reduce, or manage pain and improve a patient's overall quality of life through minimally invasive techniques specifically designed to diagnose and treat painful conditions. As nurse case managers facilitation of timely testing and ensuring the completion of treatments and procedures helps develop a clear picture of

how the individual's pain is being managed and its effectiveness in relieving or reducing the underlying pain.

The nurse case manager's assessment skills are crucial in detailing pre- and post-procedure status, documentation of symptoms, the anticipated impact in everyday life, and the longevity of response. This knowledge helps the health care provider determine the treatment's long-term effectiveness and the resulting pain relief.

## **MEDICATION MANAGEMENT**

When a nurse case manager completes the initial patient visit and evaluation, medication management is included and focuses on attaining a comprehensive list of the patient's medications. The assessment helps the nurse address whether current or anticipated medications may put the patient at risk for overdosing, underdosing, missing medications, or other contextual factors limiting adherence and contributing to suboptimal pain management. The workers' compensation industry is heavily affected by inappropriate prescribing of painkillers and the secondary medications that treat their side effects. Through medication management, case managers can educate patients, monitor adherence and progress, facilitate communication among treating physicians, and prevent treatment and pain management from

getting out of control.<sup>[vii]</sup>

## **PHYSICAL THERAPY OR CHIROPRACTIC THERAPY**

Depending upon the injury or illness, physical or chiropractic therapies may be prescribed to assist with the patient's rehabilitation and also as a strategy to alleviate pain. Research supports that physical modalities used in combination with exercise provide pain relief and help prevent future pathology and physiologic changes.<sup>[viii]</sup>

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AND SUPPORT**

"At any given time, one-in-five American adults suffers from a mental health condition that impacts their daily lives. Stress, anxiety, and depression are among the most prevalent for injured workers. Left untreated, they can render a seemingly straightforward claim nearly unmanageable, resulting in poor outcomes and exorbitant costs."<sup>[ix]</sup>

The International Risk Management Institute shares that mental health conditions can significantly impact a workers' compensation claim duration. The relationship and interconnectedness between pain and mental health cannot go ignored and should be considered when addressing and helping an injured or ill worker manage pain.

## ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES



Alternative therapies, including acupuncture and hypnosis, are considered low- to no-risk treatments used instead of or in combination with conventional medicine.<sup>[x]</sup> In 2017, The Journal of Pain, published by the U.S. Association for the Study of Pain, reported that acupuncture has a clinically relevant effect on chronic pain that persists over time and a referral for acupuncture treatment is a reasonable option for chronic pain patients.<sup>[xi]</sup>

## REFERRAL TO A PAIN SPECIALIST

In and of itself, pain lives among a broad spectrum of disorders, including acute pain, chronic pain, cancer pain, and sometimes a combination of them. A deep understanding of pain physiology and how to appropriately evaluate patients with complex pain may require a physician with specialized knowledge and skills to provide treatment.<sup>[xii]</sup>

As nurse case managers, our goal is to facilitate effective treatment of the

individual's pain and achieve optimal pain control while promoting a rehabilitation program that works to resolve the pain's underlying cause. Strategies for pain management may be facilitated through interventional injections, medications, topical applications, or surgery, to name a few, and are solely dependent on what works best for each individual, their diagnosis, and their pain experience. Resolution of the primary cause of the pain is the focus while assisting the patient in dealing with the pain as a result of that treatment or surgical intervention. The goal of all treating practitioners is to resolve the underlying cause and facilitate an effective pain management strategy while helping the injured or ill worker achieve the maximum quality of life.

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