



September is Pain Awareness Month: NMCP Pain Management



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September is Pain Awareness Month. Various organizations use this time to raise awareness of issues of pain and pain management. Naval Medical Center Portsmouth's (NMCP) Pain Management Clinic and Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic provide in-depth treatment methods which supports the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) Navy Comprehensive Pain Management Program (NCPMP).

NCPMP is an initiative to aid in the restoration of function and relief of pain by broadening access to evidence-based, standardized, multimodal and interdisciplinary pain across Navy Medicine, ensuring treatment efficacy through practice guidelines, education and analysis of treatment outcomes.

"The Navy Comprehensive Pain Management Program is not just a matter of seeing us (physicians) and having procedures and medications, it's a more holistic approach to the individual that examines everything about their life, like what they eat, how stressed they are, how they are sleeping and their activities throughout the day, because all of those things are contributors to wellness, well

said Lt. Cmdr. Benjay Kempner, a Pain Medicine Fellow in NMCP's Pain Management Clinic. "Much of the recovery we found out is dependent on these factors, individual effort and other things they do to rehabilitate and fix the things that cause the pain to begin with."

This program focuses on pain management therapies and education, alternative ways to combat pharmacologic approaches, including opioid therapy.

"All of this is to combat the opioid epidemic and for opioid safety," said Lt. Cmdr. Victor Rivera, an NMCP pain management attending physician in the Pain Management Clinic. "Everything we do is to get our patients off opioids or to significantly reduce the use."

Some of the pain management procedures are injections such as epidural steroid injections, facet injections, facet blocks and nerve blocks. Alternative therapies for pain management include acupuncture, physical therapy, pain psychology, Alpha-Stim and pain education.

"Once your pain gets to about the three-month mark, it becomes chronic pain," said Michele Guse, NMCP's Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic manager. "It is something that we have to learn to live with and deal with and learn to get through our daily activities with, it's probably not going away."

Acupuncture, a traditional Chinese medicine, is used to manage pain because needles are inserted in to certain points of the body that have more nerve endings and blood vessels and it is believed that there is a cascade of chemicals and hormones that are created because of how the nervous system reacts.

"This creates what we call happy hormones, serotonin and dopamine, to help reduce pain and make you feel relaxed, happier and helps improve mood and sleep," said Neida Fedison, the acupuncturist for NMCP's Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic. "The more complex part of the Chinese medicine is the belief that the whole body contains energy, and that energy gets blocked and it disrupts the natural balance when we suffer any physical, mental or emotional trauma. Acupuncture helps to regain that balance."

Physical therapy treatments are not the traditional physical therapy sessions. The physical therapist focuses on stretching, movement, yoga classes and pool therapy.

"For people with pain, traditional physical therapy has not been 100% successful, so the therapists focus on movement with pain and what is safe to do," Guse said.

NMCP has two pain psychologists and they do a myriad of different therapies, including cognitive behavior therapy, independent and group sessions, acupuncture relaxation therapy and pain education.

psychology perspective,” said Darren Love, a pain psychologist for NMCP’s Interdisciplinary Pain Medicine Clinic. “Teaching patients what is chronic pain and ways to learn to live with it. We teach them how to communicate more effectively with others and they learn how to manage stress, all of those things, and more, are built into the program to, again, teach them to learn how to live with their pain.”

The newest pain management therapy offered at NMCP is Alph-Stim. It is a clinically proven medical device that relieves anxiety, insomnia and depression using electromedical technology. Alpha-Stim begins at the electron level, allowing the body’s cells to return to their natural functioning state.

“Our goal is to help our patients learn how to manage their pain so they can live the life they want without it causing so much distress,” Love said. “If we can improve their mood and their sleeping, we are more likely to improve their overall pain and their perception of pain, allowing them to stay on active duty.”

As the U. S. Navy’s oldest, continuously-operating hospital since 1830, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth proudly serves past and present military members and their families. The nationally acclaimed, state of the art medical center, including its ten branch and TRICARE Prime clinics, serves the Hampton Roads area and additionally offers premier research and teaching programs designed to prepare new doctors, nurses and hospital corpsmen for future roles in healing and wellness.