

# PAINMEDICINE NEWS

[print this article](#) | [close](#)

## CHRONIC PAIN

ISSUE: 3/2008 | VOLUME: 06:03

### Web Site, Self-care Help Ease Chronic Pain

In an effort to find an effective way to reach more people in chronic pain, Illinois researchers have created an online intervention program to promote self-care techniques. Their findings: When it comes to controlling pain, self-care can be a powerful painkiller.

"When we surveyed the Internet, we found that there's a lot of information on pain, but there weren't Web sites to help people self-manage pain in an organized and coherent way," said Rebecca Berman, PhD, co-investigator of the pilot study, conducted by the CJE SeniorLife Leonard Schanfield Research Institute in Chicago. The online intervention was developed in collaboration with Midwest Palliative & Hospice CareCenter, in the nearby suburb of Glenview.

The six-week pilot study involved 78 volunteers, aged 55 years and older, who had at least two medical conditions contributing to their pain. Of those, 41 were instructed to visit a Web site, [chronicpaincontrol.net](http://chronicpaincontrol.net), with activities designed to teach them how to manage their pain and reduce its interference with their activities of daily living. CJE is currently developing plans to provide the service to the public for a fee.

This Web site provided six self-care management techniques, including journaling, audio relaxation, deep breathing, and exercises in art and positive thinking, intended to relieve stress and provide distractions from pain.

The intervention group was required to visit the site at least once a week for six weeks and to try each module at least once. Users could use any module as often as they liked—choosing to draw, write, create artwork or use positive affirmations and humor exercises.

"Our theory was that if they could learn how to use these online modules and have daily access at their own convenience and in one location, it would have an impact," Dr. Berman said. She reported the findings at the 2007 annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of America, in San Francisco.

Participants in the intervention group visited the site an average of 22.5 times during the study period. Their pain intensity scores fell by an average of one point on a 10-point scale between when they logged on and logged off. That effect "seems to indicate an immediate benefit in actually going online and trying the exercises," Dr. Berman said.

People who used the Web site reported a reduction in the overall intensity of their pain during the study period ( $P < 0.01$ ). However, so did the volunteers in the comparison group.

"The lack of difference between groups may have been due to the short length of the intervention, or the comparison group [may have] experienced a decrease in pain intensity as they anticipated future access to the Web site," Dr. Berman said.

Use of prescription medication declined throughout the study from 1.84 to 0.97 drugs, on average, for users of the Web site, but rose for those in the control group from 0.96 to 1.81.

Researchers have known for years that people who feel helpless in the face of their medical conditions fare worse than do those with a more upbeat outlook. "The intervention group grew

more confident in using self-care techniques to manage their pain, whereas the comparison group became less confident," Dr. Berman said. "The intervention gave them a sense of taking charge, of being able to do something about their pain." In a follow-up satisfaction survey conducted six weeks after the end of the study, 93% of participants said that they had applied the self-care techniques they had learned online in everyday life.

### **Providers Overwhelmed**

An estimated 50 million Americans live with chronic pain, far more than the number of physicians available to adequately treat the problem, experts said. The prevalence of chronic pain is growing rapidly, the result of high rates of obesity and inactivity, medical advances and technology that allow people to live longer and other societal changes, said Carmen Green, MD, a pain specialist at the University of Michigan Health System Center for Interventional Pain Medicine, in Ann Arbor. "If we can teach patients how to assess pain and the impact it has on their lives and then provide them with effective treatment options, they will be enabled to return to their best health and quality of life," Dr. Green said.

"When you think about pain costing more than cancer and diabetes combined, there are many opportunities to improve the quality of pain care for the population as a whole," Dr. Green said. "Like diabetes 20 years ago, pain is a condition that is taken care of by specialists, yet we need to increase pain education for both patients as well as health care professionals. Quality online programs are one more tool in our arsenal that could help make chronic pain less intractable."

—*Paula Rasich*

\*\* This site offers a selection of articles from the current issue. For access to complete content, make sure you are receiving the print edition of PMN. [Click here for a free subscription.](#)

---

Copyright © 2000 - 2010 McMahon Publishing Group unless otherwise noted.  
All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.