Creating a pain vocabulary: The benefits of describing and disclosing pain through writing

Karin L. Becker
University of North Dakota, USA

Chronic pain sufferers have difficulty translating their abstract and subjective experiences of pain into words. Scales to quantify pain have limited success in accurately conveying the intensity and specificity of pain. Not only do patients who are unable to communicate their pain suffer from isolation and depression, but so do their spouses and children. This study examines the benefits of creating a pain vocabulary through the use of keeping a pain journal and other creative writing techniques as assigned during a six-week online therapeutic pain treatment workshop. Workshop participants must have a qualifying chronic pain condition and are referred to the class by their health care team. Curriculum includes reviewing cognitive frameworks to restructure metaphoric associations about pain. Participants who recognize pain as a communication tool have a better chance of identifying their pain and treating it. Findings shed light on correlations between a patient's ability to express pain and changes in levels of perceived pain and medication dosages. Creating a pain vocabulary is recommended as one way to disclose of tacit knowledge.

Biography

Karin Becker is working on her Ph.D. in Communication and Public Discourse at the University of North Dakota. Her specific interest is health communication and her research interests focus on pain communication and the social and professional stigmas of expressing chronic pain conditions. She is an evaluator and researcher at the Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences conducting community health needs assessments on critical access hospitals and facilitating strategic planning workshops. She has over ten years of teaching experience including teaching research methods and qualitative techniques to graduate and undergraduate students at Fort Lewis College and the University of Denver. Originally from Durango, CO, she is an avid hiker and landscape photographer but currently, her lens is focused on her five year old son and two year old daughter.

karin.becker@email.und.edu