

Key questions asked in the interview were;

1. What are the advantages of seeking help?
2. What are the disadvantages of seeking help?
3. What factors of circumstances make it easier to seek help?
4. What factors or circumstances make it difficult to seek help?
5. Who would approve or encourage you to seek help?

The people who participated in the interviews were very forthcoming with information and willingly shared their experiences of seeking help for chronic pain. Some described long and complicated journeys where many obstacles needed to be overcome before help was eventually received. The results of this phase of my research will be used as part of a larger study which is due to commence shortly. The findings from both phases will then be made available to members of Chronic Pain Ireland. It is hoped that the findings will be of great significance to both health care professionals and people living with chronic pain.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted that there are a significant proportion of people not seeking or accessing appropriate help for the treatment of chronic pain. Early intervention is key to better outcomes for people with chronic pain. However, the help-seeking process is complex and involves a great amount of self awareness, support from others and determination. The treatments for chronic pain are improving everyday and health care professionals are becoming more knowledgeable. However, it is essential that we understand the factors influencing a person's decision to seek help, in order to prevent people from suffering in silence or falling off the path to recovery, thus the importance of my research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Chronic Pain Ireland for their continued support with this research, but in particular I would like to extend my gratitude to the people who responded to the call and those who participated in the first phase of this study. Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me. I look forward to corresponding with you in the future and indeed other members who wish to get involved in the next phase (details to follow).

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Lisa and Tanya have 20 years experience in healthcare. They have trained and taught with the world's leading experts in Somatic Movement Education and Yoga Therapy. They teach private clinical sessions, train teachers, and lead workshops nationally and internationally. At Align, you're in safe hands.

Use Your Brain, Change Your Pain

Pain was a very familiar place for me. Although I had been a yoga teacher for five years, I was suffering from chronic lower back strain resulting from an old gymnastics injury. I couldn't find any way to understand it or cure it. I spent thousands of euros on therapies like physiotherapy, chiropractic work, osteopathy, rolfing, and acupuncture over several years. You name it, I tried it, and I stuck at a lot of it. It looked like I would have to stop working because I literally couldn't hold myself consistently together.

One day, a colleague saw me reduced to tears and told me a teacher was flying in from the US to give a workshop in Somatic Movement Education or SME. SME comes from the work of Dr. Thomas Hanne at the



Novato Institute, California. That was five years ago and I haven't looked back! I work as a full-time Somatic Educator now, and I am able to teach yoga all over the world. My long term yoga partner Tanya Fitzpatrick saw the daily progress I was making and was inspired to do the training with me. Together, we created Align, a company which specialises in fast, sustainable pain relief. We teach you to understand the root cause of your pain and teach you how to rehabilitate yourself. Rather than becoming dependent on your therapist, you learn the skills yourself and often achieve faster more immediate results.

The most common causes of pain that we treat are muscle pain, nerve pain, joint pain and spinal pain. We see clients every day who simply aren't aware how their chronically contracted their muscles are, and the effect that is having on their pain levels. They just know they are in pain. Dr. Hanna writes "It is my understanding that perhaps as many as fifty percent of the cases of chronic pain suffered by human beings are caused by sensory-motor amnesia (SMA)."

This new term, Sensory-Motor Amnesia, which Dr. Hanna coined for descriptive purposes, refers to a condition often present in cases of chronic pain. Its most common sign is poor muscular control caused, not by damage of muscles or the brain, but by brain conditioning following injury or long-term stress. The person no longer has an accurate sense of movement and position, of which muscles s/he is holding tight and which are relaxed. Some areas of the musculature have too much sensation (pain) and some areas have diminished sensation. Some are too tight and some are too loose. Some kinds of movement are easy to control, others difficult. The pain of SMA results primarily from chronic muscular tension and soreness (fatigue); additional

pain may come from resultant joint compression and nerve entrapment

SME combats SMA. It is not an 'alternative' or 'complementary' approach to health. It is a neurological science involving the use of sensory motor learning to improve the function of the nervous system. In layman's terms, we train your brain to change your pain. Lisa says, "Your mind can learn how to ride a bike or play an instrument, but it also learns negative things, like how to contract muscles around a weak or injured spot. Often, you don't even realise you're doing it." SME provides the central nervous system with feedback which allows your brain to regain control over your muscles, permanently breaking habitual patterns of tension.

Our clients agree.

When John* came to us, he had suffered 10 years of chronic pain, sometimes very intense. He had tried many different approaches. None of them brought lasting relief. John had a trapped nerve which radiated pain from this neck to his wrist. At it's worst the pain was stabbing and burning. He couldn't do simple things like lifting his elbow without pain.

We taught John how to release the muscles around the chest, shoulder and upper back. We showed him what movements were causing pain, and taught him breathing techniques to help manage the pain. As John got better, with the help of the exercises we gave him, we taught him different breathing techniques which help release contraction and tension further.

John says, 'During more than ten years of chronic and sometimes very intense shoulder pain, I have tried many approaches, including rolfing, acupuncture, deep tissue work, physiotherapy, osteopathy, sports massage, and a lot of painkillers. None of them brought lasting relief or benefits. Somatics, however, has. This is because it seems to work directly on the control centres of the bodymind rather than merely on muscular symptoms. Instead of being the 'object' of treatment by the practitioner, the client is gently supported and empowered, by means of a gradual increase in their awareness, to re-learn and so transform their oldest holding patterns at their origin. It is the subtlest, deepest and most integrated body therapy I have experienced.'

Evelyn walked in the door with a brace on her neck. A 74 year old grandmother and energetic hill-walker, she had been very active in her life. But chronic neck strain and hip problems had stopped her in her tracks. When Evelyn came to us, she was wearing a brace to help hold her head up. We did some very simple postural work and explained to her how her neck was compensating for the tight muscles in her upper back. We worked on lengthening those muscles and her head rebalanced on top of her spine. I always joked with Evelyn that she was a Somatic Super Model. She looked so elegant and poised as she left the sessions. She no longer wears a brace and has gone back to hill walking and her daily activities. Evelyn writes 'I would like to thank you for your good work on my posture and its consequent effect on my neck and hip problems. I am writing this because I think you should know that I have not limped since I finished my course with you. Also, it's great for my morale to be able to walk down the street with my head up.'

Michael came to a group class and completed our Back in

Action six week programme where he was taught to release the tension in his lower back, increase his range of movement, breathing techniques to reduce pain and increase energy, correct postural alignment. Michael left with a series of daily reinforcement exercises to continue to help him stay out of pain. He says, 'I suffered a compressed fracture of my lower back 12 months ago and have suffered constant pain since. The back specialist told me that I would be prone to back-pain for the rest of my life. All I can say is about the somatics sessions is that they have almost completely cured the pain. I learnt more about the subject from you than I did from the specialists'.

Teresa was a keen ballroom dancer in constant pain. She had been seeing a chiropractor every 6 weeks for years for a neck problem that



caused radiating pain down both arms into her hands. We taught Teresa what muscles she was over using and what muscles she was under using. She writes 'For years the most important item in my handbag was my packet of painkillers. "Have painkillers will travel." Now I carry them as a safety net. Until Somatics my life was constant pain, broken sleep, crying the night away with pain and frustration. I had 5 sessions of light, guided and managed exercises, which taught my body to correctly reposition itself, removing the cause of the long term debilitating pain. Now I do 10 – 15 minutes gentle exercise every day. This routine helps keep me pain free and able to enjoy life. When you are in pain – "The only way is up," it has really worked for me, give Somatics a try.'

Our goal is to get you out of pain as fast as possible. On average, we see our clients for 5 sessions to relieve their pain. So what does typical session looks like? The first session involves a Postural Assessment (evaluation of postural, pelvic and spinal alignment), a Somatic Education Session, functional body movement analysis, and a hands on guided movement session. From this we develop a personalised pain relief programme tailored to you. All sessions are conducted in a pain free zone.

Each session has reinforcement exercises. Somatic exercises are very different from strengthening or stretching exercises. By releasing muscular tension, and improving control of functional movement, they break down chronic pain, improving control of functional movement, increase flexibility and correct posture. Once you are out of pain, you can join our Back in Action Programme. We will coach you back onto the golf course, train you to run that marathon, or do anything you want to do.

Align is holding an information seminar & demonstration in Somatics.

The date is the 16th April. Time 12.00 pm.

Venue: Open Mind Yoga Center

95 Pearse St.

Dublin 2.

www.openmindyoga.ie