

Choosing a Multidisciplinary Pain Program

To regain control of your life, it is important to learn how to cope with chronic pain. Although your pain may never go away, it is possible to reduce pain levels and, more importantly, to improve the quality of your life.

To do so, you may need a multidisciplinary approach to chronic pain. While many people with pain have tried every available medical intervention without great success, sometimes these therapies are most effective when performed together in a controlled setting.

A multidisciplinary pain program can provide you with the necessary skills, medical intervention, and direction to effectively cope with chronic pain. Here is advice on how to locate a pain management program in your area, what to look for in a well-defined pain program, and what other issues to consider.

Consumer Guidelines to Selecting a Pain Unit

Make sure you locate a legitimate program:

- Hospitals and rehabilitation centers are more likely to offer comprehensive treatment than are "stand alone" programs.
- Facilities that offer pain management should include several specific components, listed below.
- *The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities* [telephone: (800) 281-6531] can provide you with a listing of accredited pain programs in your area (your health insurance may require that the unit be CARF accredited in order for you to receive reimbursement). You can also contact the *American Pain Society*, an organization for health care providers, at (847) 375-4715 additional information about pain units in your area.

Choose a good program that is convenient for you and your family:

Most pain management programs are part of a hospital or rehabilitation center. The program should be housed in a separate unit designed for pain management.

Many pain management programs do not offer inpatient care. Choosing a program close to your home will enable you to commute to the program each day.

Learn something about the people who run the program:

Try to meet several of the staff members to get a sense of the people you will be dealing with while on the unit. The program should have a complete medical staff trained in pain management techniques including:

- Physician (a neurologist, psychiatrist, physiatrist, or anesthesiologist with expertise in pain management)
- Registered nurse
- Psychiatrist or psychologist
- Physical therapist
- Occupational therapist
- Biofeedback therapist
- Family counselor
- Vocational counselor
- Massage Therapy
- Other personnel trained in pain management intervention

Make sure the program includes most of the following features:

- Biofeedback training
- Group therapy
- Counseling
- Occupational therapy
- Family counseling
- Assertiveness training
- TENS units
- Regional anesthesia (nerve blocks)
- Physical therapy (exercise and body mechanics training, not massage, whirlpool, etc.)
- Relaxation training and stress management
- Educational program covering medications and other aspects of pain and its management
- Aftercare (follow-up support once you have left the unit)

Be sure your family can be involved in your care:

- Family members should be required to be involved in your treatment.
- The program should provide special educational sessions for family members.
- Joint counseling for you and your family should also be available.

Also consider these additional factors:

- What services will your medical insurance reimburse and what will you be expected to cover?
- Will you need a PCP referral?
What is the unit's physical set-up (is it in a patient care area or in an area by itself)?
What is the program's length of stay?
- Is the program inpatient or outpatient (when going through medication detoxification, inpatient care is recommended)
- If you choose an out-of-town unit, can your family be involved in your care?

- Do you understand what will be required of you during your stay (length of time you will be on unit, responsibility to take care of personal needs, etc.)?
- Does the unit provide any type of job retraining?

Make sure that, before accepting you, the unit reviews your medical records and gives you a complete physical evaluation to be sure you can participate in the program. Obtain copies of your recent medical records to prevent duplicate testing.

Try to talk with both present and past program participants to get their feedback about their stay on the unit.

Pain programs are difficult, but pain management can make a significant difference in your life. You must realize, however, that much of what you gain from your stay will be up to you.

If you need further information, please feel free to call the American Chronic Pain Association's National Office at (916) 632-0922.