

Researcher evaluates Alexander Technique in pain clinics

March 25 2010

(PhysOrg.com) -- A researcher from the University of the West of England is looking into the use of the Alexander Technique (AT) as a teaching method to help people with chronic back pain and to explore the role of a specific service in an NHS pain clinic.

UWE researcher Dr Stuart McClean will be working in collaboration with Dr Lesley Wye from the University of Bristol, health practitioners at St Michaels Hospital and STAT Alexander Technique teachers. Stuart explains that “The Alexander Technique uses hands-on to achieve greater ease and poise by removing unhelpful habits that get in the way of simple activities such as sitting, standing and walking. It is all about self management and awareness.”

He said, “Alexander Technique teaches people first to pause and to realise that there are conscious choices in everyday activities such as raising a hand, talking, using a computer, or playing a musical instrument.

“Alexander Technique requires significant effort on the part of the patient, which the AT teacher calls the 'student'. For this reason the long term impact can be very positive. Once the technique is learned the 'student' can use and practice the technique themselves, emphasising self management so that the effects may last after any formal treatment.

The University of Bristol and University of Southampton carried out a [randomised controlled trial](#), published in the BMJ, and found AT was

both clinically and cost effective for the treatment of back pain in primary care. This research builds on that study, as the researchers are looking at what happens when AT is introduced into a hospital pain clinic.

A participant in the trial, Ann Downton, 67, said, “I suffered from arthritis in the spine. I began to feel the benefits after four or five lessons. If you want something other than tablets to help back pain it can be expensive. Alexander Technique should be available on the NHS.”

Dr Peter Brook, the lead consultant at St. Michael's Pain Clinic in Bristol, said, “I was very interested to read the BMJ study on back pain. The results are very encouraging and something that should be further evaluated to ascertain its value in [chronic back pain](#). The general ethos of the Pain Management Service at University Hospitals Bristol is to encourage a [self management](#) approach to long term conditions. If lessons in the Alexander Technique can contribute to this it will be a useful addition to our range of treatment options.”

If the study demonstrates that the AT service is feasible, acceptable, cost-neutral and beneficial to service users the AT teachers will seek longer term funding to extend the service. The findings will also be disseminated widely within the local Primary Care Trust and nationally at conferences. Stuart McClean concludes, “This is a scoping study but it could have a significant impact if AT is seen to demonstrate clear benefits to the service users as well as the NHS. The results will be widely published and used to inform future decisions surrounding pain management.”

Provided by University of the West of England

Citation: Researcher evaluates Alexander Technique in pain clinics (2010, March 25) retrieved

26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-03-alexander-technique-pain-clinics.html>

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