Teaching the biopsychosocial model of chronic pain: whom are we talking to?

Huan-Ji Dong, MD, PhD, Sr. Consultant in Pain Rehabilitation Medicine; Emmanuel Bäckryd, MD, PhD, Sr. Consultant & Lecturer in Pain Medicine.

Pain and Rehabilitation Centre, Division of Prevention, Rehabilitation and Community Medicine, Department of Health, Medicine and Caring Sciences, Linköping University, Sweden

Introduction: Although a variety of illustrations of biopsychosocial (BPS) models are used in pain research, it is not always easy to apply a standard framework to explain pain for patients, communicate with health professionals and educate clinical trainees.

Objective: We aim to develop suitable models that fulfill a pedagogical process towards a target group.

Methods: Three illustrations of BPS models from the literature were selected and adapted to pain communication in clinical practice and education.

Results

In clinician-patient consultations, we want to share our understanding with patients about the interactions between biological, psychological, and social factors in the creation of suffering and pain behaviors. Moreover, we help our patients understand chronic pain does not spontaneously entail remaining tissue damage.


In daily clinical practice, we communicate with other health professionals in an awareness of the varied contributions of each BPS domain in each patient’s clinical presentation. This disproportional contribution has also a dynamical change over the time.


In the supervision of clinical trainees, one highlight is how to appropriately analyze each factor in the respective domain of the BPS model. A further teaching objective is how to identify potential complex interactions among different factors shaping one’s pain experience and pain behaviors.


Conclusion: There is a need to adapt our communication to our target groups for better-informed BPS models to explain chronic pain. These illustrations of BPS models can be used as pedagogical tools.

All figures were adapted by the authors (H-J D and EB).
Contact: Huan-Ji Dong, huanji.dong@liu.se