Working with Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Values in Chronic Pain: An Introduction and Experiential Skills-Building Workshop

Kevin E. Vowles, Ph.D.

Interdisciplinary Musculoskeletal Pain Assessment and Community Treatment Service
The Haywood Hospital &
Centre for Primary Care Sciences
Keele University

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Our goals:
• Provide an adequate description of the ACT theoretical model.

• Facilitate an accurate understanding of what is being treated and the goals of treatment.

• Allow time enough to practice methods:
  – To augment acceptance and mindfulness.
  – Of values clarification and ways to promote values-based action.
What we ask of you:
“Ground Rules”

- Humans are incredibly complex.
- Participation is encouraged, but not required.
  - See if you are willing to experiment.
Informed Consent

• At times this will be experiential
  – Meaning at times, you will be asked questions about you.

• Although you will be invited to take a few risks, your privacy and autonomy are very important to us.
Where is the “Difficulty” in Difficult Clients?
• Have you ever had a client who made you
  – Want to quit the field
  – Want to refer out
  – Want to avoid seeing
  – Want to avoid eliciting difficult material

From Hayes 2006
• Have you ever decided:
  – Not to take any more of “that kind” of client
  – Not to fill that timeslot
  – Not to care that much anymore

From Hayes 2006
The Most Complex Case I have ever seen
Radical Idea?

• For many of the people who we treat, the fundamental aspect of their struggles may be viewed as untreatable.
Where is the “difficulty” in difficult patients?

• They bring up painful and difficult thoughts and feelings in us.

• Therapist struggles with these experiences can actually magnify both the feeling and their impact.

• These struggles can negatively impact treatment.
  – (e.g., Kenny, 2004, Patient Ed & Couns; Stomski et al., 2010, Clin J Pain; Waller, 2009; Beh Res & Ther)
A possibility:
Our task is the same as our patients

Perhaps we can respond to distress/inadequacy/confusion/frustration/etc. within the treatment environment in a manner that demonstrates acceptance and willingness (and compassion) as we move in directions we deem to have meaning and value.

— This may, in turn, also have an effect on treatment.
Mindfulness defined

• Bringing attention back to the present moment when it wanders into the past or future.

• Allowing present experiences to be present.
Sometimes, our client’s goals can be defined as:

“If only I could just get rid of X”
What would be worth jumping in that water?
A Focus on Values

– Form an answer to the questions:

• “What do you want your life to stand for?”
• “Why does this matter?”
• “What brings meaning to life?”
This is not a matter of “just accept it” –

There is a value to being aware of the purposes being served by “accepting it”
Pain Variables

- Attention Control
- Acceptance
- Acceptance + Values

Branstetter-Rost et al. (2009), *J Pain*
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The Case of Simple Phobia

• Gloria: Lady in her mid-40’s with Rheumatoid Arthritis, a condition that tends to respond well to medication.

• Unfortunately, Gloria cannot take medication as she worries she will choke on it and die.

• Referral question?
  – Please help Gloria take medication.
Textbook “Systematic Desensitization”
No Medications
Buy medications
Look at medications
Hold meds in hand
Think about how it feels to take them
Drink glass of water
Take smaller pills
Take medicines

High
Low

"Complexity" of Behavior

High
Low

Severity of Anxiety

Time
Success Criteria?
Leaves Home Regularly
Walks the Dog
Visits local ducks
Rides Train at all
Takes Meds
Takes Train to London to visit daughter
Rides in cars
Drives a car
Go to dinner with husband
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Planned</th>
<th>Doesn’t Matter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaves Home Regularly</td>
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<td>Walks the Dog</td>
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Stoke on Trent Community Health Services
An exercise
• Speaker:

  – Think of something you want to change, but still have some ambivalence about.

  – Perhaps something related to a health (smoking, diet, exercise), recreation (TV watching, hobby), or work.
• Clinician:

– Your job is to listen mindfully . . .
  • You’ll notice lots of other approaches are within this.

– and to communicate a desire to understand the situation the speaker finds him- or herself in . . .
  • If you end up understanding, all the better, but that’s not really necessary.

– and a desire to understand why this change matters.
Ideas

• “I’m curious . . .”, “Would you be willing . . .”
• “What does that feel like?”, “That must feel . . .”
• “What would that do for you?”

• Please:
  – Slow down
  – Recognize that this is likely to be important
  – Notice that there is a human being across from you
  – Listen, don’t solve
How do we know when it is working?

- You are speaking slowly.
- The person keeps talking.
- The person talks more than you.
- You are following and understanding.

- The person seems to be learning, relaxing, or being more open.
- You are learning, relaxing, and being more open.

- You are asked for information or advice.
- You are receptive to information or advice.
Knowledge from Pooh

• “When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you sometimes find that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out in the open and has other people looking at it.”
Thanks for your attention.

Questions? - Kevin.Vowles@uhns.nhs.uk