

Dialectics of Distress: How to apply what we know about emotional suffering to chronic physical pain

Program Description

As a community, we need practitioners who can work effectively with people suffering with distress, including physical pain. This is especially pressing given the changes in prescription practices taking place around pain management. This workshop will provide a framework and tools to translate what you may already be doing to treat emotional pain to work more effectively with individuals suffering with physical pain. In this workshop, the presenter will elaborate on the concept, experience, and treatment of “distress,” and how it encompasses physical and emotional suffering. She will draw from current brain research on pain and from third wave cognitive-behavioral therapies—dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and other mindfulness-based approaches—to provide a rationale for what works and a roadmap to apply this to chronic, whatever its root cause. This workshop will include a mix of didactic, experiential exercises, and case examples.

Program Objectives

Upon completion of this program, participants should be able to:

- Describe the biosocial theory of borderline personality disorder and at least 1 way it applies to treating emotionally sensitive individuals;
- Explain the pain gate control theory and at least one way it applies to working with chronic physical pain;
- Discuss one significant difference between pain and suffering and the role that acceptance plays;
- Explore the concept of “dialectic” as it relates to therapeutic work with chronic pain
- Understand the significance of validation for individuals with emotional and physical dysregulation;
- Practice using at least three levels of validation in therapeutic work with individuals with chronic pain;
- Apply at least 1 “change” strategy and 1 “acceptance” strategy for working effectively with individuals with chronic pain.

Target Audience

Psychologists, Social workers, Counselors, Nurses, behavioral health practitioners, including substance abuse counselors who work with individuals with chronic pain as well as allied health professionals who work with individuals with chronic pain.

Contact Hours

This program can be adapted as a training, anywhere from 2.0 to 12.0 contact hours.

Program Agenda (example for 6 hours)

- 8:30-9:00 – registration, welcome

- 9:00- 10:15 – Dialectic approach to pain management; pain gate as science and metaphor
- 10:15 – 10:30 – *break*
- 10:30 – 12:00 – Distress as its own concept; brain science applied to clinical practice
- 12:00-1:00 – *lunch break*
- 1:00 – 2:30 – Adapting tools from 3rd wave behavioral approaches
- 2:30 – 2:45 – *break*
- 2:45 – 4:00 – Adapting tools from 3rd wave behavioral approaches, cont.
- 4:00-4:30 – Further application and conclusion

Faculty

Deborah (Debbie) Barrett, PhD, LCSW, is a clinical associate professor in the School of Social Work and an adjunct associate professor in the department of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She founded the UNC Clinical Lecture Series in the School of Social Work in 2005, and Clinical Lecture Institutes in 2014, to enhance training opportunities for MSW students along with faculty and area practitioners. She is committed to increasing access to mental healthcare services and helped found the Pro Bono Counseling Network. Between 2006 and 2016, she co-facilitated two weekly low-fee DBT groups in private practice, and currently facilitates dialectical pain management groups at UNC Psychiatry outpatient practice, where she also works with individuals. She is passionate about improving life for individuals with chronic pain, and thus provides workshops whenever asked, and penned a self-help book on pain management.