

Dialectics of Distress: How to Apply What You Know About Emotional Suffering to Working More Effectively with Chronic Physical Pain

Program Description

As a community, we need practitioners who can help people who are 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. Debbie will draw from research on chronic pain and the brain, and from psychotherapeutic approaches to chronic distress, including acceptance, change, and dialectical strategies for treating chronic distress. We will also explore the use of opioids within the context of chronic pain management including its history and risks of addiction and harm. Participants will explore ways to understand the emotional and physiological aspects of distress and increase their understanding and competency with clients who present with chronic pain. 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:

1. Explain the pain gate control theory and at least one way it applies to working with chronic physical pain
2. Explore the concept of “dialectic” as it relates to therapeutic work with chronic pain and the evidence base for this approach
3. Discuss opioids in pain management, including at least: one point about their relationship to distress, one reason why effects can be difficult to gauge, and one reason that reducing reliance on these medications can be difficult.
4. Practice with mindfulness as it applies to the pain gate
5. Teach nonjudgment to sensation as a way to shift people’s experience with pain
6. Deepen understanding of relationship of emotional and physiological distress
7. Apply seven levels of validation in therapeutic work with individuals with chronic pain
8. Identify and practice with at least one change strategy and one acceptance strategy for working dialectically with clients 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

6.0 contact hours

Agenda

9:00 AM - 10:15 AM	Dialectic approach to pain management; pain gate as science and metaphor; how to help understand and approach conversation with validation
10:15 AM – 10:30 AM	Break

10:30 AM – 12:00 NOON	Distress as its own concept; relationship of opioids and distress, and strategies for approaching opioids without invalidation
12:00 Noon - 1:00 PM	Lunch
1:00 PM – 2:30 PM	Adapting tools from third wave behavioral approaches
2:30 PM – 2:45 PM	Break
2:45 PM – 4:00 PM	Case consultation and small group practices
4:00 AM - 4:30 AM	Further application and wrap-up
4:30 PM	Adjourn

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.