Chronic Pain and Pain management Experiences among Veterans with Bipolar Disorder

Chronic pain physical pain is a significant public health concern,1 and Veterans in the VA Healthcare System report higher rates of chronic pain than the general US population2. There are alarmingly high rates of co-occurring mental health and chronic pain conditions.3 Individuals with co-occurring chronic pain & mental health disorders report worse overall health status, higher levels of pain-related disability and functional impairment, and poorer treatment & rehabilitation outcomes.4,5

**Background**

- **Most research to date has focused on the relation between chronic pain and depression, anxiety, or PTSD; there has been less focus on the relation between serious mental illness and pain.**
- **Individuals with bipolar disorder report greater pain interference & sensitivity and worse disability and quality of life relative to other individuals with chronic pain.**

**Method**

- **Sample:** N= 15 Veterans with co-occurring bipolar disorder and chronic pain. N= 15 Providers with experience working with Veterans who have chronic pain and MH disorders
- **Eligibility Criteria:**
  - Engaged in outpatient care/ Provider within the VA Maryland Health Care System
  - Diagnosed with bipolar disorder and chronic pain, as documented in electronic health records, or a Provider with experience related to pain management
  - Able to provide consent and complete a one-time interview

**Recruitment Efforts:**

- **Screening through electronic health records with follow-up approval from primary provider.** MIRECC recruitment tables
- **Email invitation to join a one-time interview and in-person recruitment to provider teams.**

**Procedure:**

- One-time in-person interview (~1 hour) focused on topics related to pain and bipolar disorder symptoms, mood and pain related to the Veterans and types of pain management services used/ offered and referred Veteran

**Data Analysis:**

- **Transcription of audio recordings of interviews, stored on the VA secure network shared drive**
- **Removal of all identifying information and assignment of fake names to each participant**

**Results**

**Theme 1: Relation Between Pain & Mood (Veteran)**

- **Depression**
  - “It's a vicious cycle...[pain's] triggering [depression] to some degree or being triggered by it.” - Zachary
  - “Hurtting all the time is no fun. All. And it gets so frustrating and once again, it'll take me in a place that I don't want to go.” - Brandy
  - “So, you know, all these emotional things going on, and then pain happening because you're having these emotional things going on... I wish I knew a switch that I could turn off... so that I could be myself again.” - Porter

- **Mood**
  - “I feel it more when I'm in my depressed mood. The pain, the aches, the exhaustion, I mean everything becomes a challenge.” - Terrell

**Theme 2: Pain, Mood, & Quality of Life (Veteran)**

- “They all have some relation in changing your mood, your desires, your wants, your needs.” - Porter
  - “My function has been compromised by the pain and mental illness.” - Zachary
  - “Chronic pain has more control over the me, okay. The bipolar I feel a sense of confidence with the medication. And if for whatever reason I'm having a bad day, I always have the movies. I get in my car. I go to McDonald's. I go and get a glass of tea. I get out of the house. Now, the chronic pain...that's more crippling on me because I can't drink tea and make that glass go. I can't do that.”

- “I like to be in control, and since I've been suffering with the different problems I've not been in control.” - Z

**Theme 3: Perception of Access to Care (Veteran)**

- **Stigma Related Limitations/Adversities**
  - “I impacted my ability to get appropriate care...they would discount my symptoms, you know, assign it to BS, you know, or just basically ignore what I was saying.” - Zachary
  - “There's a stigma around mental health...having the stigma follows you around when you go to different providers especially like pain management or ortho and they know you're a mental health patient, so they're kind of guarded in what they want to do with you.” - Vincent

- **Navigation of the System/ Self-advocacy**
  - “I think sometimes that they think that I'm asking for pain medication just to abuse it.” - Hank
  - “You see a person, and before you even judge them, you look at their chart and you go, okay, I know what you're about, so they handle you a certain way, with kid gloves.” - Porter

**Theme 3a: Perception of Access**

**Chronic Pain**

- “I am going bananas, the pain in my back will...”

**Bipolar Disorder**

- “When I'm happy and jovial, I have less pain.”
  - “The pain's like a 10. When it gets higher it doesn't have to do with doing nobody. I don't want nobody touching me.” - Hank

**Stigma Related Limitations/Adversities**

- “Sometimes I don't notice at all because I'm so raging... when I am raging it could be hurting more but I wouldn't know it...The only pain that I really notice the most...is the pain in my back...When I get my palms up, the pain in my back will always slow me down.” - Garrett

**Navigation of the System/ Self-advocacy**

- “Well, it impacts on mood. So, if I don't work out because I'm physically unable to I don't feel like doing anything else, like cooking, doing laundry, anything that's going to require me to stand long or anything like that. And of course, it affects my mood, because then I'm feeling like oh, I haven't ate or I haven't been able to clean up or do something.” - Rachel

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This poster reflects the authors’ personal views and in no way represents the official view of the Department of Veterans Affairs of the U.S. Government.

[Image: The one

The Relation between Pain and Mood among Veterans with Chronic Pain & Bipolar Disorder

References


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