

Riverdale Senior Services

Senior center client focus group

7 seniors (6 female, 1 male)

1. What type of pain problems do you deal with?

- Spinal stenosis
- Low back pain
- Osteoarthritis of hips / knees
- Osteoporosis
- Muscular pain secondary to cerebral palsy complications
- Ankle pain
- Sciatica

Memorable quotes:

“I don’t know what it is to live without pain.”

“Every day I wake up, a new part of my body hurts.”

“Pain has made me so debilitated.”

“Pain made me so depressed, that I was hospitalized at the psychiatric unit.”

“I would rather have pain than side effects of the medications.”

2. What services are offered for pain management and what has been effective so far?

- Pain medications
 - Some seniors expressed pain relief from medications such as tylenol XS, Advil, Aleve, Lyrica, Bengay.
 - It was a general consensus among the seniors that they do not like to use medications to treat their pain, mainly because of all the side effects they may cause (dizziness, falls, stomach upset). They also admitted that they find the medications ads on TV very scary/ Some of them had personal experiences with adverse events of pain medications which they shared with us, while others are weary of taking some stronger analgesics (e.g. narcotics) due to what they have heard from other people’s experiences.
- Physical therapy
 - There were mixed views about physical therapy; some seniors didn’t think it helped very much, while others said they felt better while they were participating in it.
 - One senior mentioned that the TENS machine was helpful.
- Exercise
 - Not very popular among this group.
 - There were a few testimonies of benefit from stretching exercises as it increased flexibility.

- Tai Chi/Yoga
 - Popular with the seniors as they derive a beneficial effect from these activities with pain reduction.
- Swimming
 - Was stated as helpful by a couple of the seniors.
- Heat
 - It was agreed by all seniors, that heating pads or a hot shower are very beneficial for short-term pain relief.
- Massage
 - Was not found useful – seniors stated that they left the session in more pain than when they started it.
- Acupuncture
 - Was not found useful.
- Meditation
 - A few of the seniors expressed that meditation and relaxation, which is offered at the center, are excellent ways to deal with pain. They believe in the mind-body connection.
- Distraction
 - Almost all seniors mentioned that when doing a pleasurable activity, like dancing, or when working, they forget about their pain and it doesn't bother them anymore.
- Denial
 - A large number of seniors admitted that they just ignore their pain and just live with it. They accept it's a part of aging.

3. What barriers are there to pain management and how can we overcome them?

- Fear of side effects of medications – they prefer the pain than risking getting side effects from the medications.
- Fear of addiction to opioid medications
- Concerns about reimbursement – Medicare coverage
- Lack of will power and determination to follow through with the therapies
- One senior mentioned that pain is just too strong to allow participation in exercise, yoga, Tai Chi, etc.
- Time the program is offered is inconvenient

How to overcome some of the barriers:

- Tailor programs to individuals' needs
- Concentrate on increasing motivation and social support system
- Educate seniors about pain management options

4. What would people like to have available for pain management? What's ideal?

Seniors expressed strong willingness to try new alternative pain management techniques. They all agreed that participation in certain programs, like yoga or Tai Chi, would be more feasible if these are tailored to each individual senior's needs. In their majority, the seniors stated that group programs are the best as they derive motivation from each other and also partake in a social activity.

Reading, internet, clinicians, lectures and the Arthritis Foundation were quoted as the resources used by the seniors to find out more about available pain management options.

“An acceptable day is one when even with pain you are able to get through the day.”