

MINORITY PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC PAIN:  
HEALTHCARE DOUBLE JEOPARDY

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Key Words: Chronic Pain, Culture, Pain Beliefs

Purpose: To synthesize theoretical and empirical evidence in the literature on adjustment to chronic pain with relationship to (a) communication issues between healthcare providers and minority patients, (b) ethnicity, age, and gender, and (c) pain-related beliefs. This evidence was reviewed using the conceptual background of self-organization in chronic pain, which was developed using Mishel's self-organization in chronic illness model.

Method: A literature search was performed using PubMed, Sociological Abstracts, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences databases. "Chronic Pain" was paired with "Hispanic," "Mexican American," "Culture," "Communication," and "Ethnicity."

Findings: Minority patients with chronic pain often have difficulty communicating with healthcare providers due to the nature of chronic pain, as well as their minority status. The nature of chronic pain makes it a very difficult diagnosis to make. Although many of the qualitative studies reviewed had small sample sizes, there is compelling evidence that "being believed" is a difficult problem for patients with chronic pain, and they often felt they had to exaggerate symptoms in order to get attention. Ethnicity, age, and gender, as well as pain-related beliefs, influence the expression and communication of pain symptoms, and if healthcare providers do not understand pain's many different presentations, it will not be diagnosed and treated appropriately. Minority patients with chronic pain may find themselves in a doubly difficult situation. In addition to the issues associated with chronic pain, minority patients often have language, culture, literacy, and social class differences which can create further communication problems and inequities in care. This creates a healthcare double jeopardy for minority patients, as the concept attributes of "being believed" and "accessing credible resources" are not present, and the patient cannot move toward self-management.

Discussion: There is a clear need for research which clarifies the expression and communication of chronic pain symptoms among people of differing ethnic groups, ages, and genders in order to facilitate diagnosis, treatment, and self-management of chronic pain.

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