

Psychological Issues in the Identification and Management of Acute and Chronic Illness.



Barry Kirker
Clinical Psychologist



What is pain?

- Pain is a Mind / body experience
- Involving physical pain, attitudes and beliefs, emotions and behaviours.
- How we react and manage our pain depends upon how we manage / control it.



The Impact of Pain

- Diagnosis of illness
- Impact of Pain / illness (emotional / practical losses / physical)
- Adjustment to losses
- Demands of illness (monitoring, treatment)
- Increased dependency upon others
- Impact on physical and psychological health (mobility, depression)



The Natural History of Acute and Chronic Pain

- **Acute pain (AP)** - lasts less than 3 months, initially limits activity but progressively improves).
- **Recurrent pain (RP)** episodes of AP that are not enough to restrict activity or functioning.
- **Chronic pain (CP)** - lasts more than 3 months and may cause severe disability and experience difficulties returning to work.
- CP symptoms usually suggests the influence of unidentified barriers to recovery often termed flags



Flags

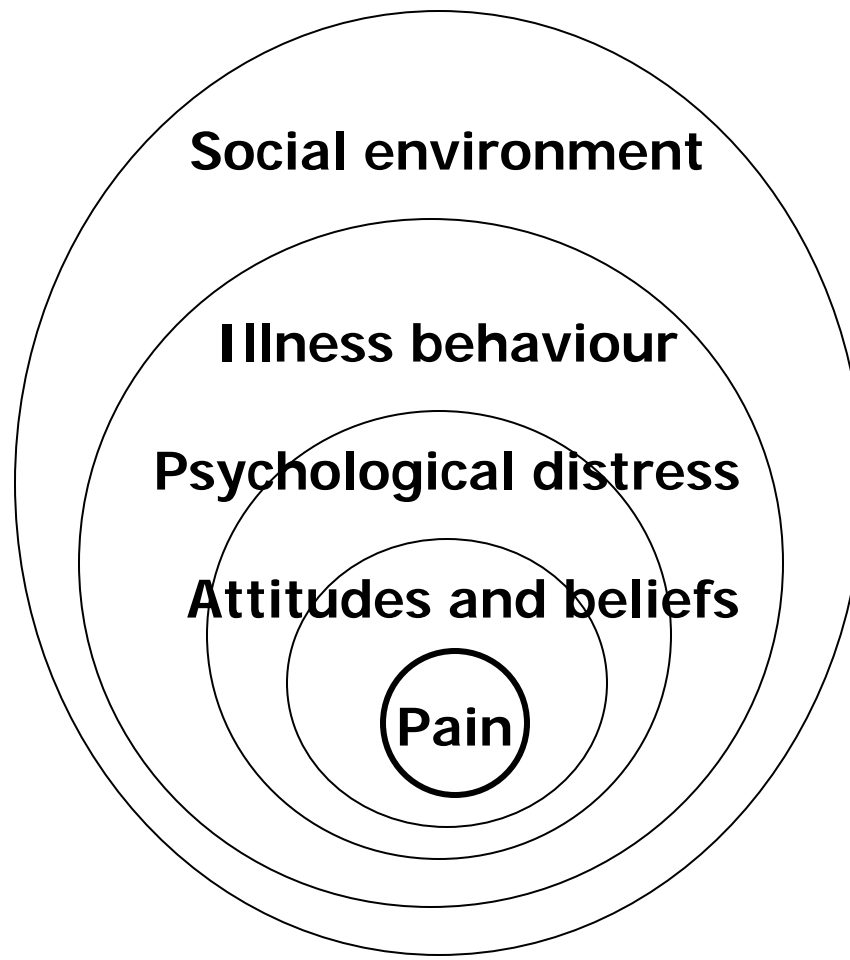
Illness Flags

- Undiagnosed illness
- Severe worsening pain (night or lying down)
- Significant trauma
- History of poor health (e.g. back pain)
- IV drugs, steroids
- More than 50 years old

Psychosocial Flags

- Beliefs that pain and activity are harmful
- Extended rest
- Depression / anxiety
- Compensation seeking
- History of absence
- Heavy work, unsociable hours
- Overprotective family / poor support

Psychosocial issues as flags

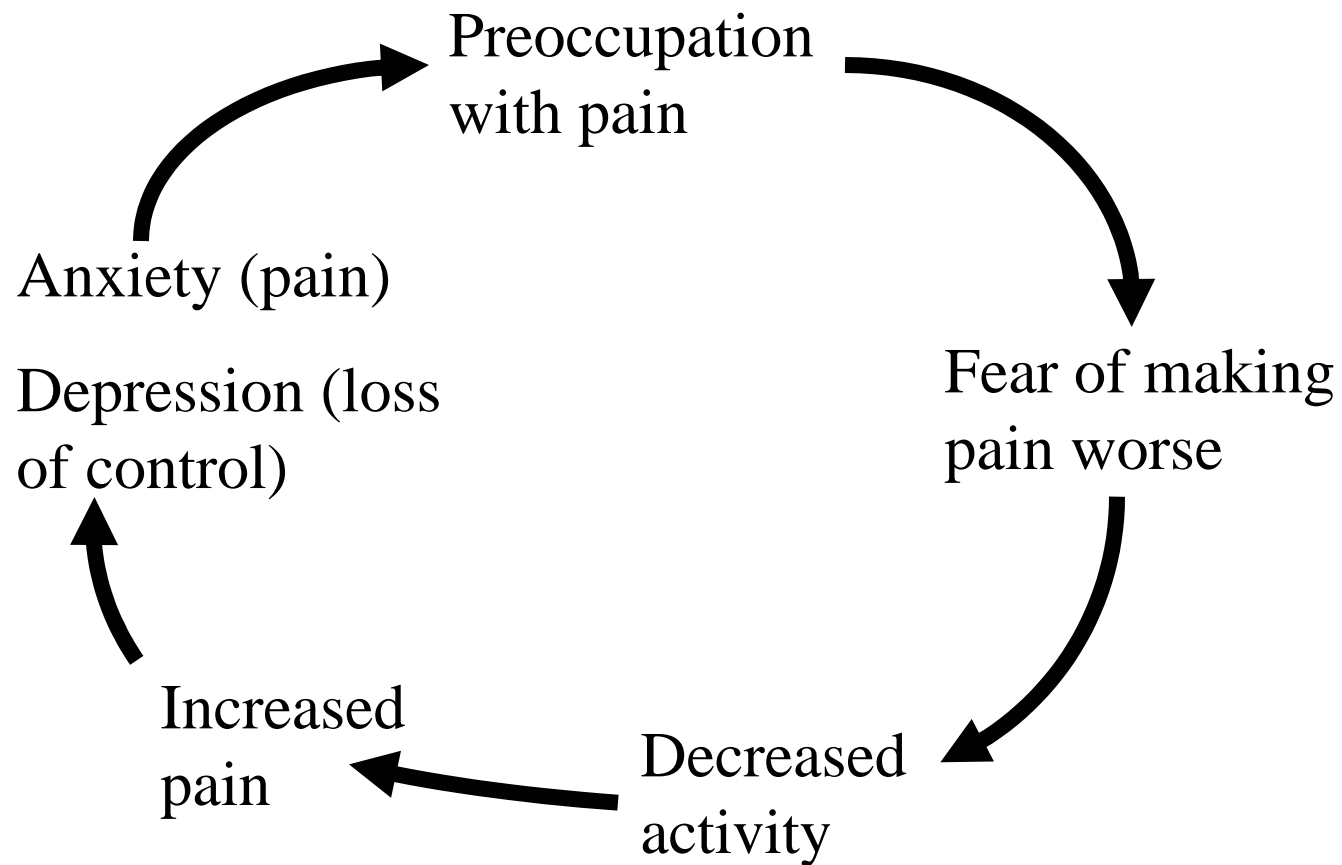




Mediating effects of psych flags

- **Social environment** – quality and quantity of personal / work support, environmental demands.
- **Illness behaviour** – exercise levels, GP / health provider attendance, compliance with treatments.
- **Psychological distress** – anxiety, anger, depression (emotional and physiological arousal)
- **Attitudes, beliefs and coping** – attributions, cognitive errors, self-efficacy, control, mastery
- **Pain** – intensity, duration, quality.

Pain affects thinking and mood which affects perceptions of pain





Risk and prevention?

Generally - The greater the number and duration of presence of flags the greater the risk!

- **Primary prevention** (early identification and intervention)
- **Secondary prevention** (removing / minimising effects of physical symptoms and yellow flags)
- **Tertiary prevention** – rehabilitation (adaptation, accommodation and adjustment)



Treatment of Pain

- Relaxation Training
- Psycho-education
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Active Coping
- Sleep Hygiene
- Goal Setting -Activity Pacing
- Imagery/ Visualization
- Relapse Prevention