

# Psychologically Informed Collaborative Conversations (PIC-C)

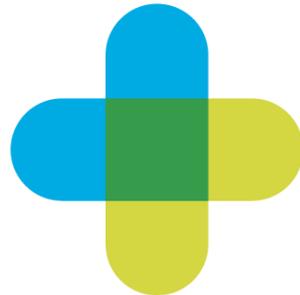
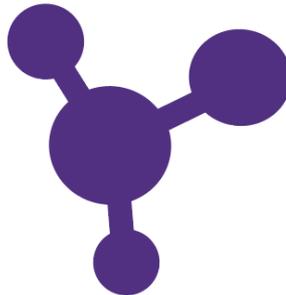
Findings from research to inform practice

October 2022

# About

The Health Innovation Network is the Academic Health Science Network (AHSN) for south London, one of 15 AHSNs across England. As the only bodies that connect NHS and academic organisations, local authorities, the third sector and industry, we are catalysts that create the right conditions to facilitate change across whole health and social care economies, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for patients.

This means we are uniquely placed to identify and spread health innovation at pace and scale; driving the adoption and spread of innovative ideas and technologies across large populations.



# The Challenge

A proportion of people presenting to physiotherapists with persistent pain will have a diagnosed mental health condition. A significant proportion of people with persistent pain will not have (or reach criteria for) a diagnosis, yet many patients seen by physiotherapists will have some level of psychological distress related to their pain, impacting on their ability to adjust to their situation and to engage well in physiotherapy.

Physiotherapists need a broad range of skills to manage consultations with people who present with a variety of different psychosocial needs, yet informally report limited opportunities, both pre and post qualification, to understand the relationship between pain and mental health or to become skilled in delivering psychologically informed consultations.

The Q Improvement Lab funded the Health Innovation Network Academic Health Science Network (HIN) to address this challenge. The project aim is to develop an innovative training and supervision package to support MSK physiotherapists deliver psychologically informed care, to improve patient experience and outcomes.

## Existing research of needs

The Physiotherapy Pain Association (PPA) in collaboration with Frank Keefe, Duke University, USA piloted an online 'psychologically informed physiotherapy' course in October 2019. The PPA and Frank Keefe were invited to join the HIN, St George's NHS Foundation Trust and Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust as collaborating partners for phase 2 of this Q Improvement Lab funded project. The aim is to build upon the online PPA pilot content and in partnership, redesign the existing resource for delivery with hospital based musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy teams.

The project team carried out two key evidence gathering pieces of work to further research physiotherapists' needs. This research has informed the design and content of the training approach and is summarised below.

### Physiotherapists Focus Groups

**Three focus groups (see table 1) were facilitated by the HIN between July 2019 and August 2020 and the findings are summarised below. The purpose was to:**

- understand existing unmet needs for physiotherapists to manage consultations with people who present with a variety of different psychosocial needs
- gather physiotherapists' recommendations for the design of a training package

**Table 1: Focus Group Overview**

Focus Group	No of participants	Format
St Georges University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust MSK outpatient physiotherapy team	8	Face to face - July 2019
Kingston Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, MSK outpatient physiotherapy team	13	Face to face - August 2019
Physiotherapy Pain Association	6	Online ZOOM meeting - August 2020

### Research report on designing a psychologically informed physiotherapy training programme

- **Research carried out on**
  - Designing a modular based training programme
  - Different learning styles and teaching methods
  - Case studies of psychologically informed training models and approaches to supervision
- **High-level recommendations from findings included** (see Appendix 2)
  - Use of Experiential Learning Theory to underpin training
  - Use of Self-reflection/practice is fundamental
  - Consider different learning styles in teaching activities
  - Use of on-going supervision
  - Importance of building a strong therapeutic alliance

## Themes Emerging from Focus Groups

Five clear themes emerged from the three focus groups carried out with physiotherapists, including some cross cutting sub-themes. These themes are summarised in this section.

The overarching feedback from the sessions shows that there is a high prevalence of physiotherapists managing patients presenting with various psychological health needs, which are often linked to their persistent pain. Although there is a sense of some physiotherapists feeling familiar with or experienced in treating these patients, the majority felt they would benefit from additional supervision/mentoring, training, and practical application of learnings to increase their confidence. This was especially the case for more junior physiotherapists. Various skills gaps were also identified, such as communication and listening skills as well as how to build a strong therapeutic alliance.

Participants in the most part felt positively about the increasing shift towards psychologically informed practice and strongly welcomed receiving bespoke training in this area.

## 1. Confidence

- Low confidence talking to patients presenting with psychological health needs
- Difficulties in taking a more psychological approach to conversations, especially by junior clinicians
- Uncertainties around where to signpost patients
- Need to build more confidence in how to establish therapeutic alliance and trust
- Low confidence in helping patients to reconceptualise their beliefs on pain

*"I'm confident in recognising signs and symptoms – I'm not confident in what to then do about it"*

*"If you asked me as a junior I would have been a little less comfortable talking about it [...] I'd probably be intimidated by the information"*

*"I know how difficult it can be for patients to talk about it? so when they do I want to respond in a helpful way and feel quite anxious that I don't always manage this well."*

## 2. Skills gaps

- Lack of or insufficient training on how to incorporate psychological support into physiotherapy treatment
- Predominantly received theoretical training that is not always refreshed as a practicing physiotherapist
- Gaps in ongoing mentoring and reflective practice with peers are
- Communication and listening skills could be improved

*"there needs to be follow up after you have tried things in practice to review how things went and adjust as needed"*

*"we don't share enough about what we are talking about – what examples you used, what other examples could you have used."*

*"as physios we're not taught to be the best listeners [...] sometimes we do forget how to listen well, and then sort of navigate our way through the patient rather than the form"*

## 3. Importance of therapeutic alliance

- Being mindful of the dynamic between patient and clinician
- Listening and gaining patient's trust
- Patient-led treatment

*"one of the barriers for me to make that therapeutic alliance [is because] I come from MSK pro-forma type [approach] of me asking the questions expecting very exact answers"*

*"really important thing that I found [that] hasn't necessarily been a part of training so much is to encourage physios to ask patients what they actually want"*

*"the power relationship is [...] crucial [...] both parties are listening and contributing [but] we don't realise that we have more power"*

#### 4. Feelings about the shift towards psychologically informed practice

- Positive feeling but acknowledgement that it takes time to embed the change
- This approach provides more freedom and flexibility when treating patients
- Link between physical and psychological in treating pain management is not always accepted or supported - both clinically and from the perspective of patients' expectations

*"it's given me freedom to explore [...] how they have come here and what they want me to help them with, rather than me being so prescriptive"*

*"It shouldn't be that a psychological approach is the last step to dealing with your pain, that's what it feels like to us"*

*"I think we are just at that stage where we understand it is moving in a different way but we are not sure how to do it yet"*

#### 5. Views on training

- Need for on-going or follow-up supervision and not just stand-alone training sessions
- Peer reviewing/mentoring opportunities to discuss experiences of applying learnings in practice
- Opportunity to apply learning in practice
- Communication and listening skills

*"it needs to be an ongoing thing that you need to have someone that you can refer back to"*

*"How to implement it, how to make the link, help them make the link and how to move forward together"*

*"opportunity to reflect with peers [in a] very supportive and non-judgmental environment"*

*"practical based sessions"*

# Putting research into practice

The findings from the focus groups and research exploring evidence from other psychologically informed training programmes delivered to Physiotherapists informed the design of an evidence-based Therapeutic Interactions and Person-centred care Skills (TIPS) training package, to be piloted in Autumn 2020.

TIPS is a 16-week training and supervision package to enable physiotherapists to:

- deliver psychologically informed physiotherapy sessions to patients,
- support identification of unmet mental health need,
- support onward referral/signposting if needed.

TIPS focuses on exploration and application of therapeutic approaches used in the pain management field. The course content is grounded in behaviour change theory and underpinned by aspects of cognitive and behavioural approaches including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Mindfulness. The TIPS course is focused on experiential learning – learning through doing. The course comprises of two learning blocks - experiential and supervisory.

## By the end of the experiential learning block, participants will:

- Have personal experience of brief techniques to reduce threat/stress responses and promote soothing and present moment focus (breath focus, relaxation, body scan, mindful movement).
- Have personal experience of collaborative goal setting, working towards a valued based goal, and reviewing learning from practice.
- Have experience of the therapeutic process, setting expectations, orientation to a model, participation in structured and collaborative sessions, preparing for setbacks, and ending.
- Have insight into the nuances of the therapeutic alliance, how to foster effective therapeutic relationships, and how an effective therapeutic alliance can support achievement of goals in the longer term.
- Have an understanding of, and experience using established techniques in clinical practice, such as, the adaptation model, values-based goal setting, functional analysis, exploring behavioural patterns, and fostering long term change.

## By the end of the supervision block, participants will:

- Have personal experience of structured small group supervision.
- Have experience of presenting a supervision question considering biopsychosocial aspects of a person's experience and brief history to the supervision group.
- Have had the opportunity to develop deeper learning through supported integration of new skills into clinical practice and reflection on the outcome.

# Further information

Evaluation of the TIPS project will be available April 2021. For more information please contact Amy Semple, Q TIPS Project Lead at: [a.semple@nhs.net](mailto:a.semple@nhs.net).

## Appendix 1

Focus Group transcripts



Kingston Focus  
Group.docx



PPA Focus  
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St. George's Focus  
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## Appendix 2

Psychologically informed physiotherapy training – research report



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Research Report\_Fir