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Patients' Perspectives on Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS)

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Abstract

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) is a chronic musculoskeletal pain syndrome of unknown origin and uncertain prognosis. In this study, patients' perspectives of their experiences of fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) were explored using grounded theory methodology. Of particular interest were their perspectives on aetiology, symptoms, intervening conditions, coping strategies, and consequences of FMS. Eight FMS sufferers participated in one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interview transcriptions were analysed using Strauss & Corbin's (1990) paradigm model of grounded theory. Findings indicate a degree of conceptual overlap with previous literature in terms of the known aetiology. However, new evidence appeared in the form of a combined reactive, idiopathic onset, with more support for a multifactorial FMS aetiology. Further, familial and heredity factors emerged as more significant aetiologies than was previously suspected for FMS sufferers'. Symptoms for the present sample parallel to those of the literature. Specifically, both chronic pain and fatigue emerged as the most salient and disturbing symptom of the FMS experience. Pain assumed the role of the basic social process (BSP) in the core category that summed up the FMS experience. One new crucial finding was the degree of cyclic association between pain, fatigue, and sleep disturbance, which interacted to create and maintain other FMS symptoms. Public and professional misperceptions, medical assistance, and knowledge of the condition emerged as important intervening conditions in the present population. Positive deferral emerged from the data as a new cognitive coping strategy. Moreover, a link was supported between cognitive coping strategies and self-efficacy. A new emergent pattern for FMS sufferers revealed an evolution in the type and application of coping strategies. Consequences of FMS condition fluctuated and varied among patients according to various intervening conditions. The report discusses implications for patients, health professional and researchers. In general, the patients' perspective and dialogue on their own condition should be given greater weight in the diagnosis and treatment of FMS.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late grandfather, Chao-Chieh Chuang, whose memory lives on in my heart. Your value of higher education instilled in me a desire to achieve.

I dedicate this thesis to my family, particularly my father and mother, Nien-Tsu and Yueh-Ling Cheng. Your love and unwavering support guided me to where I now stand.

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No research, no matter how elaborate in design and planning is realised without the time and patients of the research participants. This is particularly the case with the present research where participants shared their experiences in prolonged in-depth interviews under conditions that may have aggravated their condition. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those Fibromyalgia patients for their willingness to discuss their condition. Through your time, I hope that this research may go some way towards alleviating you of your pain.

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