



## Providence House

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**In this issue two of our practitioners are eager to share with you their understanding and expertise in two areas that impact on the mental health of Australians, both young and old: PAIN MANAGEMENT & PLAY THERAPY**

With National Pain week (July 24 – 30) just behind us, as an allied health group we think it is important to devote some time to helping you to understand chronic pain, why pain persists and what can be done to help.

One in five Australians are living with chronic pain, including adolescents and children. For people aged over 65, chronic pain is even more common with one in three people living with this condition. Pain is the most common reason that people seek medical help – yet it remains one of the most neglected and misunderstood areas of healthcare.

### **So, what is chronic pain?**

Medically speaking, pain is said to be chronic if it persists beyond the normal healing time of about three months. Many people are new to the notion of chronic pain because they are taught that pain goes away when tissues heal after an injury or illness.

While there may be some injuries that take longer than three months to heal, medical specialists believe that most injuries have healed as much as they are going to after this three-month mark.

Why then do people continue to experience pain? What does this pain mean? Chronic pain occurs because of changes to the nerves or nervous system which keeps the nerves firing and signaling pain.

Pain is really a protection system that our brain uses to keep us safe: we need to be protected from touching hot stoves otherwise we will burn ourselves, so when our hand registers heat and sends this message up to the brain via our nerves, the brain creates a sensation of pain so that we remove our hand and thereby protect ourselves.



### **Upcoming Events**

#### **Winter Break:**

**Friday 11 August to  
Wednesday 16 August.**

Providence House takes a few days break during Ekka Week due to heavy traffic issues.

#### **Positive Health & Emotional Wellbeing Group Programs:**

- **Young Adults** (30 & under) commencing Friday 25 August 11am (fortnightly)
- **Older Adults** commencing Wednesday 30 August at 11.30am (fortnightly)

**PHOEBE COOPER**  
**Psychologist –  
Health & Pain Clinician**

**DEANA WAINWRIGHT**  
**Occupational  
Therapist &  
Play Therapist**

**CHRISTINA HULLY**  
**Clinical Psychologist  
& Director**

Even when our body tissue has healed (e.g. bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments) pain can become chronic when our nerves in our body and spinal cord misfire or amplify messages to our brain, leading our brain to interpret that we need to experience pain to protect ourselves from further damage. While our brain is trying to be helpful and trying to protect us, in chronic pain we are usually not at risk of causing further damage to our body.

However, there are likely to be other precipitating factors with chronic pain including genetics, gender, previous episodes of acute pain and even stressful life events that occur prior to, during or after we first become injured. Chronic pain can be intense and unrelenting, and leads to various degrees of disability if it is not managed well.

### **What does having chronic pain mean?**

Imagine if you were in intense pain after hanging out a load of washing - so much pain that you were unable to move for minutes, hours or days afterwards. For those of you reading who have chronic pain, this probably is not too hard to picture! For people who have chronic pain, they are usually feeling pain of varying intensity at any time during the day or night. This means they aren't able to engage in the same activities they may have done prior to becoming injured and may even be unable to work due to the pain. They may have difficulty sleeping due to pain, and they may feel frustrated, overwhelmed or depressed because of their pain.

These are all normal reactions to chronic pain, but they can be very unhelpful and start to impact negatively upon many areas of life, including but certainly not limited to, relationships with loved ones, enjoyment in life and engagement in hobbies or valued activities.

### **What can be done to help people with chronic pain?**

People with chronic pain indicate that one of the main things that helps to reduce their pain is to take medications. Sometimes, your Doctor may prescribe different medications to help manage pain, however this is a complex system involving many aspects of human functioning. Doctors can provide medication that will temporarily provide some pain relief, but in many cases of chronic pain there is not a cure.

When working with people with chronic pain, pain specialists encourage patients of the understanding more fully this complex system and how other health practitioners can also assist. Often, you may find benefit from seeing a Physiotherapist who can help you to understand your pain, develop strategies for managing your pain including pacing or exercises to strengthen your muscles that may have deconditioned over time without use. Psychologists can also help with managing the stress and distress associated with chronic pain, and help you to learn to live a life that is enjoyable and valuable to you even with your pain.

Unfortunately, no one possesses a 'magic wand' cure for chronic pain. However, Providence House practitioners understand that pain can have an immense impact on life and your enjoyment of it, and we can help you to understand your condition and work through how you can get back to the meaningful aspects of life even with some pain.

**If you or your patients are experiencing chronic pain please contact Phoebe Cooper at Providence House to arrange a consultation. Phoebe is available Thursdays and Fridays.**

## What is Play Therapy?



Play therapy session with Judi Parson (Deakin University Play Therapy Professor)

Play therapy is to children what counseling is to adults. Play therapy utilizes play, children's natural medium of expression, to help them express their feelings more easily through toys instead of words.

The Australasian Pacific Play Therapy Association (APPTA) defines Play Therapy as being founded on a number of theoretical models whereby the trained play therapist utilises the power of play, within a therapeutic relationship, to relieve suffering, prevent or resolve emotional and behavioural difficulties and to achieve optimal growth and development of children (or older individuals) (2014).

Research supports that play therapy is an effective means for children to communicate and work through their worries. Substantial progress has been made in proving the utility of play therapy interventions to treat a wide range of childhood disorders and difficulties that interfere in children's normal development. Specifically, play therapy demonstrates beneficial outcomes on social skills and social adjustment, self-concept, language and academic achievement, trauma symptoms, internalizing problems, functional impairment, caregiver/child relationships and a range of externalizing behavior problems including ADHD symptoms, aggression, conduct problems and disruptive behaviors. Play therapy demonstrates beneficial effects in relatively few number of sessions (mode = 10-16 sessions) and appears to show stronger outcomes for children under 8 years of age and when caregivers are involved in treatment, i.e. filial play therapy.

## Providence House

*Nurturing Emotional Wellbeing*

'Providence' means using good judgement and taking the time to manage and carefully use resources. One of our greatest resources as human beings is ourselves; and 'house' means the place where human beings come to shelter. At Providence House, we aim to provide a place where people of all ages can come, take time and receive assistance from highly trained psychologists, counsellors and other allied health practitioners, such as occupational therapists and speech pathologists, to begin to know themselves better and develop effective ways to function in everyday life. Providence House is a place that promotes the understandings of human strength and potential.





Play therapists use a range of toys that are carefully selected to allow children to express and explore their experiences. Sturdy, easy to clean toys that represent expressive play themes such as nurturing, real life, aggression and fantasy, and that are appropriate from a gender and cultural perspective, are recommended (Landreth, 2012).

Suggested toys for the play therapy room include dolls house with family and baby dolls, hand and finger puppets (animal and human), art supplies (pencils, paints, craft materials, modelling clay), transportation vehicles, plastic animals, toy soldiers and action figures, Lego or construction blocks, play cookware, play handcuffs, foam sword, rubber knife, play doctor's kit, play money, toy construction tools, dress up clothes or fabrics, musical instruments and balls (Cochran, Nordling & Cochran, 2010; Ray, 2011). Order and consistency of set up of materials is recommended to promote safety and regularity for the child.

There are a variety of approaches to play therapy however the therapist usually starts with a child directed approach, allowing the child to explore the room and the toys with tracking and reflective skills from the play therapist. The play therapist may use a variety of techniques such as sand play, art, puppetry, clay work, creative visualization, therapeutic storytelling, drama role plays, dance, music and movement.

Australia now has a Master's in Child Play Therapy offered through Deakin University Melbourne which is a 2 year full time degree. Specialist skills and training are required to be an accredited Play Therapist so it is important to check the qualifications and training of your play therapist.

**If you are interested in making a referral for play therapy, please contact Deanna Wainwright (Occupational Therapist & Play Therapist) at Providence House or email [deannawainwright@providencehouse.com.au](mailto:deannawainwright@providencehouse.com.au)**



Play Therapy Room at Providence House

**For more details of all practitioners at Providence House please see website**

*Appointments are currently available*

**Tuesday to Friday between 9am & 6pm and Saturdays between 9.30am & 2.30pm**

*Off-site and Home visits can be arranged*

*Referrals accepted through BrisbaneMIND*

*Reduced rates for children under the age of 18 years*

*Medicare rebates are available for those with a GP mental Health Care Plan referral or a referral from a Psychiatrist or Paediatrician*

*Psychologists will bulkbill those with HealthCare or Pension Card*