Communication in the context of acute pain
– Persuasion or validation?

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How do you communicate with someone experiencing non-specific acute pain? If you consult current clinical guidelines you will be informed that a clinician should alongside providing a clear explanation and share a positive prognosis also reassure the patient. Reassurance means the removal of ones fears and doubts and thus techniques focusing on how to alter a negatively oriented mindset into a positive one has dominated the field of pain communication for a long time. This is then thought to alter beliefs and expectations, which results in better outcomes for these patients.

However, the concept of reassurance is at odds with some of the ideas underpinning modern psychology. According to these ideas, it might be more beneficial to put an effort into making the patient feel understood, i.e. feeling validated by the clinician. This is thought to result in a better regulation of emotion that ultimately leads to a lessening of the pain problem. The problem with this is that it becomes a counterpoint to the persuading element inherent in reassurance. So what to do when communicating with someone in acute pain, do you need to persuade or can it be efficient to validate?

This dissertation extends current knowledge on communication in the context of acute pain. By studying a variable supposedly sensitive to shifts in beliefs in acute pain patients and conducting controlled experiments in which the impact of validating communication was explored while investigating if this effect was due to improved emotion regulation.

Taken together, this dissertation indicates that validating communication shows promise as a form of effective communication in the context of acute pain, in that it influences both pain catastrophizing and recall. The dissertation does not give support to either changes in beliefs nor emotion regulation being the mechanism of change for effective communication. Thus, this dissertation propose a new model of effective communication based both on previous research highlighting the effectiveness of information and the research presented in this dissertation, more focused on the role of psychological processes.