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

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

Historically, the dominating theoretical framework for communication in the context of acute pain is reassurance. An inherent assumption of this framework is that the person in pain needs to have their fears and doubts removed and be educated, or persuaded, that the pain problem is not dangerous. This is then thought to lead to a shift in beliefs that later explain future beneficial outcomes.

In later years, another communication technique known as validation has started to gain traction in the pain field. This technique focuses on legitimizing the thoughts and emotions of pain patients and is instead thought to influence outcomes through better emotion regulation.

The overall aim of this dissertation is to extend current knowledge on effective communication in the context of acute pain. In one observational study a variable supposedly sensitive to shifts in beliefs was observed in a cohort of acute pain patients over the course of the first three months after pain onset. Also, in two controlled experiments we explored the impact of validating communication on pain relevant variables 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 such as pain catastrophizing.

Keywords: Acute pain, communication, validation, reassurance, expectations for recovery, catastrophizing, recall, misdirected problem solving, psychological flexibility.

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