

Coping skills training in rheumatoid arthritis research recognized by BSBS of MI

27 May 2015

Mark A. Lumley, Ph.D., professor and director of the clinical psychology Ph.D. program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Wayne State University, recently received the 2015 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation McDevitt Excellence in Research Award in the area of clinical research.

This award, along with a \$10,000 grant to support Lumley's research, was given to him for his recent research article entitled, "The Effects of Written Emotional Disclosure and Coping Skills Training in Rheumatoid Arthritis: A Randomized Clinical Trial," published last year in the prestigious *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

The study revealed cognitive-behavioral coping skills training (CST) had positive effects on the pain and mood of [patients](#) that lasted for at least one year, whereas written emotional closure (WED) - expressive writing about stress - had only temporary and inconsistent benefits on patients' joints and functioning, and did not help with pain or mood. The combination of CST and WED had had no unique benefits.

CST trains patients in various cognitive and behavioral techniques or skills to enhance their ability to cope with pain and improve their behavioral and psychological functioning. A few studies have shown that WED can reduce stress and improve health by having patients write privately for 20 minutes each day for three or four days about stressful experiences and their deepest thoughts and feelings.

"Our study revealed that patients with RA receive positive benefits in both the short and long-term using cognitive behavioral techniques such as relaxation, increasing pleasant activities, changing negative thoughts, and problem solving," said Lumley. "WED, however, was less effective, and an examination of patients' expressive writings suggests that many patients either did not have

much unresolved stress or more likely did not know how to effectively identify important stressors, label and express their negative emotions, and learn from or resolve these conflicts while writing by themselves. We probably need to identify and target those patients with unresolved stress or trauma, and then help them more effectively disclose and work with their unexpressed emotions."

The research team noted that continued development and integration of therapies that target the full range of processes underlying pain and functioning - not just biological but also behavioral, cognitive, emotional and interpersonal - are critical for helping more RA patients have better health status.

More information: *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*,
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24865870

Provided by Wayne State University

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