

Chapter 32

Manage My Pain: A Patient–Driven Mobile Platform to Prevent and Manage Chronic Postsurgical Pain

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the Manage My Pain digital pain management platform and its integration into the Transitional Pain Service at Toronto General Hospital. A collaboration between ManagingLife, the developer of Manage My Pain, and the Transitional Pain Service led to the creation of a patient-provider virtual community with the aim of managing complex pain after surgery so as to prevent the transition from acute post-surgical pain to chronic post-surgical pain. User engagement, motivation, and satisfaction are discussed with respect to the needs of (1) people living with pain and (2) health care providers. Challenges in implementation are described, along with new features developed for the digital platform as a result of the partnership between ManagingLife and the Transitional Pain Service.

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INTRODUCTION

Cindy was diagnosed with severe fibromyalgia in 1996 after a shoulder injury -- in addition, she was suffering from pain due to severe whiplash, spinal stenosis, arthritis, bone spurs, degenerative disc disease, and multiple sclerosis. An orthopedic surgeon informed her she would require surgery on her back and neck; however, she was unable to afford health insurance, and surgery was not an option. The prospect of living with severe pain for the rest of her life, and not being able to work to support herself financially, left her feeling depressed and made it difficult to hope for recovery and a life without pain (ManagingLife, 2012).

In 2011, a doctor suggested that Cindy keep a “health journal” to track her symptoms and manage her painful conditions. The health journal was useful but time-consuming and paperwork-heavy. She looked for a smartphone application that would be more effective and convenient and discovered the app, Manage My Pain. The app enabled her to track important information to manage her pain on a daily basis such as symptoms, pain triggers, and treatments for her pain – all with little hassle and in just a few minutes. Tracking and visualizing her pain through the app helped her learn more about her chronic pain. Moreover, she was able to share her data with her doctors. Manage My Pain helped Cindy create a patient-provider virtual community, which ultimately enhanced her ability to effectively manage her chronic pain (ManagingLife, 2012).

Cindy’s struggle with chronic pain resembles that of hundreds of millions of chronic pain sufferers around the world. Unable to afford or access pain management services, many people are left to suffer alone, desperate, and impaired. The implementation of a virtual community within the pain management domain presents the dual opportunities of reducing barriers to chronic pain management for people living in pain, and optimizing the delivery of effective treatment by pain clinicians. This chapter chronicles the integration of the award-winning digital pain management platform, Manage My Pain, into an innovative hospital-based pain service to create a patient-provider virtual community with the aim of preventing and managing chronic pain after surgery.

BACKGROUND

The Burden of Chronic Pain

The *silent epidemic* (Wall & Jones, 1991) of pain is a source of tremendous personal suffering, disability, and healthcare expense. Globally, 20% of the population lives with chronic pain, with one-third reporting that their pain is severe (Breivik, Eisenberg, & O’Brien, 2013; Goldberg & McGee, 2011; Schopflocher, Taenzer, & Jovey, 2011).

Chronic pain is generally defined as pain that persists beyond three to six months (Katz, Pagé, Fashler, Rosenbloom, & Asmundson, 2014; Treede et al., 2015), exceeding the expected timeframe for tissues to heal after injury, surgery, or illness (e.g., cancer). When pain becomes chronic, it can become a primary disorder in its own right: due to changes in pain processing in the central nervous system, *pain itself* is now the problem, rather than signaling the presence of other underlying physical or medical conditions (Siddall & Cousins, 2004; Tracey & Bushnell, 2009). Once pain becomes chronic, its course is expected to be long-term and possibly even life-long. Treatments are focused on pain reduction and self-management, rather than cure.

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