

Latest News

Physician Attitudes about Fibromyalgia

by Kristin Thorson, Fibromyalgia Network Editor
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"Twenty-three percent of general practitioners and 12 percent of specialists characterized fibromyalgia patients as malingerers," states a study by a team of investigators who surveyed physician attitudes throughout Canada from 2007 to 2008. * These statistics are outright offensive (and they should be), but most people with fibromyalgia already harbored suspicions that this was the case.

The published report outlines many reasons doctors give to justify why they view fibromyalgia in such a poor light. But don't feel as though you should have to put up with other people's unfair opinions about you. A just-published book by **Kevin P. White, M.D., Ph.D.**, can help you fight back against unfounded critiques about your condition with the use of science-backed examples that prove fibromyalgia is real.

The study surveyed 189 general practitioners (GPs) and 139 specialists. The key issues centered around physician attitudes about the condition, their perceived skills with being able to diagnosis and treat fibromyalgia, and their "perceptions" of patients.

Attitudes

Obviously, those physicians who believed fibromyalgia patients were malingerers had serious doubts about the validity of this condition. What could they be thinking? Here is what one GP and one specialist had to say:

"I'm not convinced, how can I convince somebody? That's my problem, I am not convinced at all." (GP)

"It's a fuzzy concept. It's a fuzzy clinical situation." (Specialist)

Diagnosis

Close to 40 percent of the doctors reported that the diagnostic criteria were unclear to them. Referring to the criteria, one GP said, "We definitely don't understand it as well as we need to."

Another said, "It's very subjective," adding that it is based on faith that patients are telling the truth when the diagnostic tender areas are pressed.

Although two-thirds of the doctors said fibromyalgia was diagnosable, many complained that the assessment was subjective.

Treatment

Lack of knowledge and skill in treating fibromyalgia was reported by 30 percent of the GPs and 24 percent of the specialists. One GP said, "There are a few drugs that have been tried and nothing really works too well." Surprisingly, even a specialist commented, "There is nothing more I can offer them."

To assist with treatment, doctors are used to using tools or tests that gauge progress. A majority of the doctors felt that lack of monitoring tools presented a major challenge to them for treating fibromyalgia. Commenting on this topic, one specialist said:

"We are used to clinical markers of disease in our work, usually. And here the markers are distress and suffering, and we are not trained to treat distress and suffering."

Half of the physicians felt unequipped to offer psychological support to fibromyalgia patients, although an even greater percentage stated that they should be doing more for this patient group.

Perceptions

Fibromyalgia patients were described as "time consuming and frustrating" by 76 percent of GPs and 64 percent of specialists. As one GP explained, "You don't really see any concrete results. It's always like a constant decline, so it becomes very unsatisfying."

Many doctors looked down on patients seeking disability for their fibromyalgia and even made statements to the effect that patients wanted to be ill. One specialist said, "They want to live with it, they want to keep it up."

* Hayes SM, *et al.* Fibromyalgia and the therapeutic relationship: Where uncertainty meets attitude. *Pain Res Manage* 15(6):385-91, 2010.

Book Validates Fibro Symptoms

Tired of trying to defend yourself against ignorance and false perceptions about fibromyalgia? Most patients are.

Breaking Thru The Fibro Fog: Scientific Proof That Fibromyalgia Is Real by **Kevin P. White, M.D., Ph.D.**, delivers exactly what the book title says. He rebuttals common misconceptions about fibromyalgia with a dose of logic and examples of well-known medical conditions that do not have a simple blood marker to make the diagnosis a slam-



dunk. Throughout the book he comments how fibro should be no different!

"Many a person with fibromyalgia has felt the world that they knew before they became sick, totally blown apart," writes White. "Shouldn't that be enough to warrant at least a little bit of compassion and help from the rest of us?"

Get the respect you deserve from your doctors, family, friends, and co-workers. Learn more about White's book, with the foreword written by **I. Jon Russell, M.D., Ph.D.**, by visiting www.wortleyroadbooks.com. The retail price of the book is \$24.95.

On the above website you will be able to read White's biography, his introductory chapter that explains why he wrote the book, and the table of contents. In addition, White is generously donating 15 percent of the proceeds to the [American Fibromyalgia Syndrome Association \(AFSA\)](#) to directly fund research on fibro.