

What is the project about?

Writing Pain is a partnership between the pain management team at Powys NHS Teaching Health Board, Creative Writing at Aberystwyth University (first supervisor) and The Reading Centre for Cognition Research (second supervisor). It is about practical intervention in pain management – by using creative writing as a tool to communicate, document and manage chronic pain conditions – supported by academic research into the way pain is perceived and narrated, both in the individual and in society.

What are the likely research questions?

We aim to investigate:

- how patients and practitioners can use creative writing as an intervention in chronic pain, and how this intervention can be most effective
- how patients and practitioners construct narratives of pain, and how effective these narratives are at communicating the reality of experience.
- how different narratives can change the experience of pain.

What is the research context?

This is an original project which aims, for the first time, to undertake an in-depth exploration and analysis of the relationship between writing and pain.

The pain and fatigue management service at Powys Teaching Health Board is led by Dr Owen Hughes, consultant psychologist, and Clare Clark, Advanced Practitioner/Occupational Therapist. Creative-writing workshops have featured in their residential provision for patients, and skype follow-ups have been evaluated as tools for countering the isolation caused by chronic pain conditions. The PhD student would be jointly embedded with the pain management team and at Aberystwyth University, to enable both the development of practical approaches and the investigation of evidence and practice for academic research. The project sits within the Board's priority for promoting well-being – enabling people to 'live well' – and innovative environments, as outlined in the Integrated Medium Term Plan (2020/21) and the draft Health and Care Strategy.

Dr Jacqueline Yallop has delivered a series of creative-writing workshops and events at Bronllys Hospital since September 2018. Focussing on the development of narrative to allow patients to re-examine their approach to, and relationship with, pain, these interventions have demonstrated that creative writing can change the way those with pain think about themselves and their condition. Jacqueline has worked on a number of interdisciplinary research projects, using her expertise as a novelist and memoirist to investigate the relationship between personal and social narratives, and to explore ways in which control of language can transform experience.

Professor Emma Borg is Director of the Reading Centre for Cognition Research and has an established background in interdisciplinary projects involving clinical partners. She is currently working with practitioners in the Pain Management Unit at the Royal Berkshire Hospital on a project which aims to better understand how patients and clinicians think about pain, and the extent to which these ways of thinking impact on both the communication and experience of pain. She is interested in 'top down' methods of pain management (i.e. how the things we believe and desire

modulate pain experiences), including ways in which creative writing can alter how subjects' experience or conceptualise their pain.

What are the main works or collections in this area?

This is a new and original area of academic investigation, with little published or practical research evidence.

Joanna Bourke's *The Story of Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) remains a key text exploring the experience of pain in an historical context. Further texts, listed below, consider ways of communicating pain, and the inadequacy of language in expressing the pain experience. An AHRC-funded project at Lancaster University has begun to use writing as therapy for painful conditions, with a focus on publishing pieces of writing (not yet available). None of this research, however, investigates the process of intervention or examines the role of narrative.

Aydede, M. (Ed.), *Pain: New essays on its nature and the methodology of its study*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

Halliday, M. 'On the grammar of pain'. *Functions of Language*. 1998; 5: 1-32.

Schiavenato, M, Craig, KD. 'Pain assessment as a social transaction: beyond the "gold standard"'. *Clin J Pain* 2010; 26:667-676

Vukovic, N., Fardo, F., Shtyrov, Y. 'When words burn – language processing differentially modulates pain perception in typical and chronic pain populations'. *Language and cognition*, 2018; 22

What approach is proposed?

The project will combine practice-based research with academic investigation. Interventions and methodologies will be evaluated to inform academic research about the nature of pain and our approaches to understanding it.

The project is interdisciplinary in nature, with a focus on creative writing, current medical practice and philosophy, but drawing on other disciplines, including psychology, literature and history of medicine. The student will be assisted to create a workable framework from the wide field of options available.

The existing workshops will be developed and extended to explore the key research questions articulated above. These workshops will explore and develop ideas of narrative, such as world-building and character development.

A developmental three-year programme of interventions based at Bronllys Hospital will be combined with remote activities using Skype and other technologies. Medical staff and practitioners will be widely included in the project, as well as patient users, to examine a stated lack of expertise among health professionals in articulating and communicating the experience of pain.

Why is this a doctoral project?

The student will have the opportunity to combine practical intervention with academic research, developing a broad range of skills both in a hospital context, with individuals, and in an academic setting. The student will be expected to participate in, and develop, workshop and remote activities

with patients and practitioners, and to construct a framework for examining this evidence as part of a wider interdisciplinary investigation into the relationship between narrative and pain.

The scope and originality of this project is suited to doctoral work, requiring advanced and flexible research skills from the student, a significant amount of individual working, creative thinking and an interdisciplinary approach. Investigating and articulating the nature of pain, by examining traditions from diverse fields, the student will be required to create his/her own research framework while contributing to the ongoing work between the partners.

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