Chronic pain (primary and secondary) – using NICE guidelines for assessment and management

Assessment for people aged 16 years and over with any chronic pain

Recommendations in the NICE guideline on chronic pain for patient-centred assessment, thinking about possible causes, talking about pain, providing advice and information, developing a care and support plan and flare-ups

Chronic pain and a NICE guideline for the condition

Management options in the NICE guideline for the condition (for example, NICE guidelines on endometriosis, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, low back pain and sciatica, neuropathic pain, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, spondyloarthritis)

Chronic primary pain

Examples include:
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic primary headache
- Chronic primary musculoskeletal pain
- Chronic primary visceral pain

Chronic primary pain has no clear underlying condition or symptoms may seem to be out of proportion to any observable injury or disease.

The clinical presentation is consistent with the ICD-11 definition

Management options in the NICE guideline on chronic pain:
- Exercise programmes and physical activity
- Psychological therapy
- Acupuncture
- Pharmacological management

Use clinical judgement:
- to assess whether the pain or its impact is out of proportion to the underlying condition and would be better managed as chronic primary pain
- to inform shared decision making about options in the NICE guideline for the underlying condition and the NICE guideline for chronic pain if chronic secondary pain and chronic primary pain coexist

Chronic pain persists for more than 3 months. Chronic primary pain has no clear underlying condition or is out of proportion to any observable injury or disease. Chronic secondary pain is a symptom of an underlying condition. Chronic secondary pain and chronic primary pain can coexist.