

Chronic Pain Choir – The Benefits of Group Singing in Patients with Spinal Cord Stimulators

Background: Singing has well-documented benefits for emotional well-being¹, improved breathing and lung function², posture and body control, relaxation and stress relief, and physical activity and energy^{3,4} improving cardiovascular⁵ and immune systems⁶. Similar to the principles involved in pain management programs, group singing promotes acceptance and behavioural change and improves self-efficacy⁷.

We sought to start a group choir in our neuromodulation chronic pain population in effort to bring the physical, emotional and mental health benefits of group singing in parallel with medical therapies.

“Knowing that I’m coming to do something for my pain makes me feel less guilty to be out.” – Choir attendee

Methods: The chronic pain choir was advertised to all existing neuromodulation patients. The choir ran for 6 consecutive weeks for one hour, led by experienced singing tutor. Warm-up activities focused the mind and regulated breathing, followed by singing of familiar songs with emphasis on breath control and visualisation using techniques from yoga disciplines.

Participants who volunteered to join the choir were approached towards the end of the 6 sessions and asked to complete a short questionnaire on their perceived benefits from having attended the choir. At the final session attendees were encouraged to complete a survey of their experiences. This included an invitation to participate in semi-structured interviews to evaluate their experiences in more detail and provide an evaluation of the service. Questions explored their pain experience, barriers to attending choir and the perceived benefits and any negatives of attending choir. The interviews were then transcribed and thematically analysed by two individuals trained in qualitative analysis.

“Singing is really engrained in my daily life now...” – Choir Attendee

Results: 9 participants attended the choir (all female), consisting of 6 patients with chronic pain, alongside staff from the chronic pain service. The questionnaire was completed by 4 attendees, following this three participants agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Survey respondents noted choir had made them more active (4/4 agree or strongly agree), given them enjoyment (4/4 agree or strongly agree) felt their mood was better after choir (4/4 strongly agree) and reduced feelings of isolation (4/4 agree or strongly agree). The word attendees most commonly associated with choir was “fun”.

Interviews echoed the survey results, with interviewees exploring themes of of social connection, having fun, evaluating their emotions and the impact of pain, relaxation, spirituality and mindfulness, social connection and making friends, continuation of the musical and singing experience and their experience of time related to their pain.

Although overall the feedback in the interviews was generally very positive, interviewees used the interviews as an opportunity to express how their pain limits them with more than one participant exploring how choir had provided them with the opportunity to do something for themselves. Their interactions in choir had also caused interviewees to consider their self-image in relation to their pain, and regular trips into the city had led some to re-evaluate the place they live.

“It also helps you be out of yourself for a while, you can be and feel a bit freer.” – Choir attendee



“It’s made me fall in love with the city I live in again” – Choir Attendee

Discussion and Conclusions: Social prescribing aims to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect health and wellbeing. It is a key part of the NHS Universal Personalised Care approach⁸. A chronic pain choir is an example of how an intervention with a social prescribing approach in chronic pain can bring about appreciable differences to individuals’ quality of life. Whilst our small sample size cannot capture complete experiences from all of the choir’s attendees; the reduction in social isolation and improvement in activity levels illustrated in the survey show how interventions such as this can address areas of patients lives that medication struggles to target. The themes brought out in interviews reflected the real value that attendees placed on both the physical and psychological benefits to group signing. Singing brings significant health benefits to patients suffering chronic pain, improving quality of life, and can aid in pain management alongside therapy with spinal cord stimulation.

Feel-Good Songs
Energing and invigorating Relaxed, inclusive, No Pressure
Do you enjoy singing?
Would you like to get together with other people who live with Chronic Pain?
Then come and join our....

Chronic Pain Choir

No music sheets, just words! Simply fun Improved well-being
Experience Health Benefits of Breathing and Singing

Cost: £4 per session, total 6 sessions Tea/coffee and biscuits included

Venue: Fridays 1-2pm
Leeds City Museum, Millennium Square, February 10th, 17th, 24th
Across from LGI March 30th, 17th, 24th

Join Emma for up-lifting soul, pop, jazz and folk classics in the welcoming and inclusive Chronic Pain Choir. We know the healing, energising and physical benefits that singing brings, and the Leeds Chronic Pain Service wants to bring the choir experience to you. Emma Sangster is a singer and piano player with over 15 years' experience, and is working with the Leeds Teaching Hospitals Pain Management Team in setting up the choir.

Beginning with breathing techniques we will explore the body with the intention of finding the body's own soothing systems. Using the waves of the breath we can work to expand our capacity for peace, acceptance and joy. Moving this sound we will explore our voice, within the comfort of our community. Everyone will stay safely in their singing comfort zones, as we find the comfort in our bodies and have fun!

We have taken every precaution in relation to minimising risk from COVID and other respiratory infections. With spacing and good ventilation of the area, masks will not be required during singing. Please do not attend if you have any symptoms of COVID. Please contact us if you have any questions in relation to your individual risk, particularly if you are in a vulnerable category.

If you are interested in coming to the choir, please reply to leeds.chronic.pain@nhs.uk to express your interest.