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The Psychology of Pain

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THE UAE has seen an increasing number of patients with chronic pain conditions, especially lower back pain, over recent years. Chronic pain is one of the most common reasons for primary medical care visits and affects up to 80 per cent of adults at some point in life. Most common reasons for chronic pain include musculoskeletal pain, particularly lower back pain, headaches and neuropathic pains from advanced diabetes.

A recent study published by the American Psychological Association showed when it comes to chronic pain, psychological interventions often provide more relief than prescription drugs or surgery without the risk of side effects, but are used much less frequently than traditional medical treatments. A separate UAE study found neuropathic pain is a major contributor to chronic lower back pain in the Gulf region.

The studies show traditional medical approaches

utilising non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are inadequate in many chronic pain scenarios, while anti-depressants and anti-convulsants (medications to prevent seizures) can have remarkable effects on many forms of chronic bone and joint pain.

German Neuroscience Centre Neurologist, Dr Jutta Marquardt, explains: "Here in the UAE we see patients suffering from chronic pain on a daily basis.

"Many of them are treated inadequately with painkillers such as Aspirin or Ibuprofen for years. Moreover these medications can have severe side effects, like gastrointestinal bleeding or can even be the cause of pain.

"After years of suffering and lots of treatments, these patients are very happy to find an alternative new treatment that relieves their pain." Marquardt says for many patients it's a new approach to be treated by a neurologist for chronic pain but they are happy if they can find relief.

"There are several treatment options which unfortunately are mostly unknown by the patients," she says.

Christina Burmeister, a counsellor at German Neuroscience Centre, adds: "Any patient suffering from chronic or severe diseases can profit from psychotherapy, especially patients suffering from pain. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy was underestimated for a long time but as new studies prove, they are highly effective. In some cases even more effective than medication, with less side effects."