



Learning to
Apply
Mindfulness to
Pain

Newsletter #3

Connecting with the LAMP Study

Letter from the LAMP Principal Investigator

I'm excited to be sending out our third LAMP newsletter. The LAMP study is going great. We have been recruiting many Veterans with pain, like you, who are helping us develop better ways to treat pain. In this issue of the newsletter you will learn about some of the other LAMP team members and chronic pain tools.

Make sure to check your email for your incoming survey!



We will also make these newsletters available on our website: <http://lamp.umn.edu>. Feel free to reach out to us at 877-467-5079 or email us at vhaminLAMP@va.gov. We'd love to know what you think.

Best wishes,

Dr. Diana Burgess



The Importance of Social Connections

What are social connections?

Social connections are the relationships you have with the people around you. They may be close, like family, friends, and coworkers, or more distant, like people you know casually. They can be as close as next door or so far away that you only connect with them by telephone or through the Internet.

Why are social connections important?

Resilience, the ability to bounce back after stressful situations, is strengthened when you give and receive support. Building positive relationships with people can make a difference in how resilient you are. Try to connect with people who have a positive outlook and can make you laugh and help you. The more positive your relationships are, the better you'll be able to face life's challenges.

The support you get from your social connections can add to your feelings of meaning and purpose in life. These, in turn, add to your resilience. Happy, resilient people tend to be more connected to the people around them.

How can you make more social connections?

There are many ways you can start building positive relationships:

- Send an encouraging email or text message to someone who's going through a hard time.
- Look for a faith community that shares your views. It may also have its own organized social groups.
- Call a food bank or hospital and ask about their volunteer programs.

You can also connect with people through social media on the Internet. Many people interact more freely with people they can't see face-to-face. Online forums about specific interests can be a good choice for people who cannot leave their homes or are shy or self-conscious.

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LAMP STUDY TIMELINE

Phase 1: May 15, 2018 – May 14, 2020

- Develop materials ✓
- Pilot the LAMP STUDY ✓

Phase 2: May 15, 2020 - May 14, 2024

- Recruit Veterans to participate → Ongoing
- Veterans participate in LAMP interventions → Ongoing
- Collect survey data → Ongoing
- Analyze survey data
- Publish results for academic audiences
- Distribute results to Veterans and broader audiences
- Conduct “implementation analysis” to learn how to translate this study into real life



Q & A with Chris Veasley, Member of LAMP Study Advisory Panel



Q. Could you tell us a little about who you are and why you wanted to get involved in pain management research? Why is pain research important to you?

A. When I was 15, I survived a near-fatal accident. In the 30 years since, I've lived with life-altering chronic pain. Like millions of others with various chronic pain disorders, I've struggled to identify knowledgeable health care providers and effective treatments. One reason this is such a challenge is due to the longstanding underinvestment in scientific research on chronic pain. As a result, very little data exists to tell us which treatments work for whom, at what risk and at what cost. Without this data, both clinicians and patients struggle to make informed decisions on which treatments to utilize alone, in succession and/or in combination. Patients end up undergoing a trial-and-error process – which can take months to years – to identify therapies that help to reduce the severity and impact of their chronic pain without intolerable side effects. This process took me over a decade. It became very clear to me a few years into my journey that without an expanded pain research effort, this scenario wouldn't improve much for the millions of us living with chronic pain. As such, my life's work has been as an advocate for pain research – working to educate key decision-makers, such as members of Congress, federal health and research agencies, insurance companies, educators, and others, about the gravity of the nation's epidemic of chronic pain and the urgent need for an expanded and expedited research effort on chronic pain.

Q. What would you say to a person with chronic pain to encourage him/her to participate in the LAMP study, keeping in mind that 1/3 of Veterans will be randomly assigned to the “treatment as usual” group (although they will have access to the mindfulness app after they complete the study.)

A. We are never going to know which treatments work for which chronic pain sufferers until we conduct studies like LAMP – where the active treatment is compared to “treatment as usual.” Unfortunately, this means that a percentage of study participants will not be able to receive the active treatment (which in this study is mindfulness), so that investigators can compare whether there is any additional improvement in the group that received the active treatment. What is really beneficial about the LAMP (and other) studies, however, is that the active treatment is being made available to everyone in the trial at some point in time. If you are one of the study participants assigned to the “treatment as usual” group, you will be able to utilize the active treatment after the study is completed. You will have contributed to the advancement of our knowledge base, helping us to understand which people will benefit (or not) from mindfulness over “usual care.”



Q & A with Chris Veasley, Continued...

Q. What would you say to a Veteran who feels isolated and/or hopeless about his/her pain?

A. There are many resources available to help people with chronic pain (can we provide a reference to Veterans services available to people reading this here?) One thing that I would emphasize as vitally important from my own journey is to identify something that you feel passionate about and that engages your mind and spirit. When you are in pain all the time and you think about pain all of the time, life and its circumstances easily become overwhelming. We all need something to engage our minds, distract us (even if momentarily or temporarily) from the physical suffering and help us to heal the emotional suffering that ensues with chronic illness. At the lowest point in my journey, for me, this was to get out of the house and immerse myself in a beautiful setting – a beach sunrise, a short walk in the woods. Over time, this grew into a passion for photography and capturing scenery and images that I can share with offers living with chronic illness to offer hope and encouragement. The activity will be different for each one of us, but it is possible to find something that you're passionate about, even with severe chronic pain.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to Veterans with chronic pain?

A. Please don't give up. Help and hope are available. Reach out and connect with others. There are clinicians, scientists and others who care deeply about people with chronic pain and who have made it their life's work to study, as well as improve the treatment of, chronic pain. They fight for us each and every day so that our tomorrows are better than our yesterdays.



What do you like to do for self-care?



Study funded by the Department of Defense. For more information visit the LAMP website at: <https://lamp.umn.edu>

Lead Researcher: Dr. Diana Burgess

Q&A with Jason, a LAMP Veteran Engagement Panel Member:

Q. Can you tell us about who you are and why pain research is important to you?

A. I am Jason Gladney an Army veteran and currently employed as the Facility Projects Manager for the Corp of Engineers in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Pain research is important to me because pain affects nearly everyone and most disabled veterans. I would like to take an active role in finding better solutions for pain management.



Q. Why should Veterans consider participating in LAMP?

A. I would refer to our overall service mantra of “No one left behind.” If we as veterans don’t assist in helping other veterans then we are leaving our people behind. The LAMP Program is an opportunity to continue the conversation and find possible solutions that are better for pain management. I also believe by helping others you can also help yourself.

Q. What would you say to a Veteran who feels isolated or hopeless about his or her pain?

A. You are NOT ALONE. Do not be a “secret agent” and suffer in silence. The VA has a tremendous network of counselors and resources, however you must tell someone that you are suffering. There is no honor in “suffering in silence.” Outside of the VA there are countless other medical personnel and programs you can pursue. Be proactive. Tell someone and get help.

Q. What would you recommend to Veterans, to help them with their pain?

A. Effectively communicate with your care provider. Honest, candid and clear communication with the personnel who are treating you. It is nearly impossible to help if they are unclear of your needs. I would also say don’t think that there is only one way to treat pain. Most believe the only way to treat pain is medicine, however we know now that is inaccurate. You must be an active listener and open to all options.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to say to Veterans with chronic pain?

A. Fight. You have proven that you are resilient by your service. You are important. You are not alone. Someone wants to help you. Reach out and communicate. Don’t give up!

RESOURCES FOR WHOLE HEALTH (videos, podcasts, and articles):

<https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/tag/livewholehealth/>

<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/features/index.asp>

We’d love to hear from you. Call us at 877-467-5079 or email us at vhaminLAMP@va.gov.

Check out our website at <https://lamp.umn.edu>.