

Volunteering with Pain Concern

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Managing chronic pain requires a multidisciplinary approach, and charities like Pain Concern play a crucial role in supporting people living with chronic pain.

Chronic pain is a complex and debilitating condition that affects many people worldwide and can have a significant impact on an individual's quality of life and mental well-being. In this interview, Anna Blackwall, an osteopath and former occupational therapist, shares her insights on chronic pain and her remote volunteering work for Pain Concern, an Edinburgh-based charity that works to improve the lives of people living with pain and those who care for them.

Anna Blackwall's background as an osteopath and occupational therapist has provided her with a unique perspective on the management of chronic pain. She volunteers with Pain Concern, an Edinburgh-based charity that was founded in 1995, it describing itself as a charity for people in pain, professionals and anyone who cares for someone in pain. Anna explains that they have three aims which are producing information, providing support and raising awareness about pain.



Pain Concern is a charity working to support and inform people with pain and those who care for them, whether family, friends or healthcare professionals.

They believe that pain is best faced together by the 'Pain Community' of people with pain, their family, supporters and healthcare professionals.



painconcern.org.uk

As an osteopath working part-time in Bedale, North Yorkshire, Anna says that her interest in chronic pain comes from her experience working with patients who are living through extremely challenging events.

'There are a few reasons that I decided to remote volunteer for Pain Concern,' she explains. 'The COVID-19 pandemic provided a period of reflection for me. I have two young children, the youngest born at the height of the pandemic in 2020. This has made me re-evaluate what is important for my career and the fulfilment that I get from my work as an osteopath.' Anna loved working as an associate for the various clinics and continues to work at a practice, but she realised that she wasn't managing to build as many skills as she wanted, such as team working and administration.

'Along with a personal pain experience, I came across Pain Concern and really liked their principles and belief that pain is best managed with the support of others. I also feel passionately that all people should be able to access up-to-date and good quality information, not just those that can afford it, and this is where charities like Pain Concern can make a huge difference to a person's life,' she adds.

With her role as a project assistant volunteer, she gets a task to complete which is generally researching around a subject. She then has a regular check-in with the HR team who she describes as 'very supportive'. This is all done remotely and is very flexible, and approximately one to two hours per week but this is variable depending on the task.

Privileged position

'Throughout my career I have found working with chronic conditions the most rewarding part of my role as an osteopath,' says Anna. 'However, on return to work in 2022, I noticed how chronically stressed a lot of my patients were, I could have a day when most of the people I see have had significant trauma or are living through extremely challenging events. As osteopaths, we are in an incredibly privileged position that we have the time and skills to be able to listen to the whole story and we are in a unique position to help people with chronic pain.'

She explains that her work as an osteopath is centred around the individual and what they need and believes that a mixture of education and hands-on treatment can work well for people with chronic pain, but it is crucial to understand the underlying cause of the pain to provide effective management.

Using resources such as information on sleep, relaxation, and pain physiology to help patients better understand their condition, Anna also uses gentle osteopathic techniques, such as breathing exercises, to help patients manage their pain.

Highlighting the importance of listening to patients' stories and helping them realise they are not alone, she believes that charities like Pain Concern can offer a huge amount of support to patients with chronic pain.

Anna has been volunteering for Pain Concern as a project assistant volunteer. She was attracted to the charity's principles and belief that pain is best managed with the support of others. Pain Concern produces information,

provides support and raises awareness about pain. It offers a range of resources such as leaflets, podcasts and a self-management tool, as well as a volunteer email and telephone helpline.

Listening to the patient

Anna emphasises that taking time to listen to patients' stories is a critical aspect of helping people with chronic pain. 'Charities like Pain Concern can offer a significant amount of support to patients who may otherwise have little support,' she states. She finds Pain Concern's evidence-based resources to be incredibly useful and often shares them with her patients. Patients are also directed to Pain Concern's self-management tool, which helps guide patients and enables them to bring up their concerns and worries in healthcare appointments.

Anna has recently started the SIRPA (Stress Illness Recovery Practitioners' Association) training course. She believes this course fills in the gaps and gives her the confidence to discuss lifestyle and emotions with patients as a contributor to their chronic pain. She does use a range of gentle osteopathic techniques, but her favourite technique now is teaching patients about the importance of deep breathing.

'I feel that a large part of helping someone with chronic pain is to take time to listen to their story and for them to realise they are not on their own. Charities like Pain Concern are instrumental in this and can offer a huge amount to patients that otherwise would have little support,' she says.

Managing chronic pain requires a multidisciplinary approach, and charities like Pain Concern play a crucial role in supporting people living with chronic pain. Osteopaths can benefit greatly from the resources and support offered by Pain Concern, which can help them in their practice and in directing patients to additional support. By working together, healthcare professionals and charities can help improve the lives of people living with chronic pain.



For further information visit painconcern.org.uk



Anna Blackwall

Anna qualified as an osteopath from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2012. Prior to that, she was working as an occupational therapist at a large hospital in Yorkshire.

Over the past 10 years she has worked for various osteopathic clinics as an associate in North Yorkshire. She is presently working part time as an associate at a practice in Bedale, North Yorkshire.



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