

The Psychology of Pain: Implications for Practice and Policy

Keynote Sessions

Faculty:

Michael Sullivan

Over the past three decades, research has shown that psychosocial factors are important in the onset, severity, expression and recovery from painful health conditions. As a result, biopsychosocial models have evolved to become the dominant explanatory frameworks guiding research on pain and disability. But that hasn't been the case in practice; traditional biomedical pain models continue to characterise pain treatment in primary care and insurance policies. Pain-related psychosocial factors are rarely assessed in primary care and, in the case of insurance policy, can be the basis of claim denial. There are real barriers to bringing biopsychosocial models into primary care and insurance policy pain management. Questions that are not easily answered include: How and when should pain-related psychosocial factors be assessed? What types of interventions could be used to target psychosocial risk factors for adverse recovery outcomes? Are such interventions accessible? What are the insurance risks of considering pain-related psychosocial factors as legitimate treatment targets for individuals with debilitating pain conditions? The challenges of answering these questions will be addressed in this presentation.

About Our Speaker:

Michael Sullivan

Dr Michael Sullivan is a clinical psychologist currently a Professor of Psychology, Medicine, Neurology, and Physical and Occupational Therapy at McGill University. He holds a Canada Research Chair in Behavioural Health. Over the past 30 years, Dr Sullivan has worked as an educator, clinician, clinic director, and department chair. He has consulted with numerous health and safety organisations, veterans' administration organisations, insurance groups, and social policy and research institutes. In 2011, he received the Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology from the Canadian Psychological Association.

Dr Sullivan is best known for researching psychosocial risk factors for pain and disability and developing risk-targeted interventions to foster occupational re-engagement following injury. One such intervention, the Progressive Goal Attainment Program (PGAP), has been included in the Official Disability Guidelines (Work Loss Data Institute) as an evidenced-based approach to managing work disability.

