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Project: Validation and Diagnostic Uncertainty in Pediatric Chronic Pain



Background

Chronic pain is often experienced in the absence of injury or organic pathology, has largely unknown etiology, and is complex to treat. Families reaching a chronic pain clinic have often undergone years of searching for the cause of pain, ineffective treatments, and invalidation by healthcare providers. This process fuels diagnostic uncertainty (DU), the perception that labels or explanations for a patient's health problem are missing or inaccurate. DU affects one third of youth seeking chronic pain treatment and is associated with worse pain outcomes and wellbeing. Recent research has revealed that DU is a

socially co-constructed phenomenon. Specifically, pain (in)validation by physicians has been identified as a critical aspect of clinical encounters that impacts DU in patients with chronic pain.

The proposed study will examine how clinician (in)validating behaviors within a tertiary-level pediatric chronic pain clinic influence parent and child DU over time.

Focusing on the initial physician-family encounter, the study will investigate: (1) how clinicians (in)validate parents and children throughout the encounter; (2) how (in)validation is related to DU over time; and (3) whether the influence of (in)validation on DU is strongest in particular parts of the encounter.

Physician (in)validation is a patient-identified concern pertinent to chronic pain care. This project will improve our understanding of how and when physician (in)validating behaviours influence DU and the trajectory, course, and prognosis of pediatric chronic pain outcomes. Examining the role of (in)validation in physician-family encounters offers a potential transdiagnostic target for improving care alliance, diagnosis, and treatment.

Queenie Li is a University of Calgary Clinical Psychology student mentored by Dr. Melanie Noel. She holds a BSc in Biology from McGill University and a BSc (Hons) in Psychology and Women's Studies from the University of Calgary. Queenie is dedicated to finding ways that we can live better together. She believes a key to achieving thriving communities is to support those in the most vulnerable positions, including children and marginalized individuals. As such, her breadth of research experience in psychology, public health, and education is connected by a focus on advocacy and justice. She is particularly interested in addressing critical gaps in prevention and intervention that center the influence of social factors on the mental health and functioning of youth and their families.