



# LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE CENTER

## Chronic Pain and Medication Dependency Program

*Chronic Pain, Meaning, and Spirituality: A Qualitative Study of the Healing Process in Relation to the Role of Meaning among Individuals with Chronic Pain*

### Research Conducted By

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### Program Description

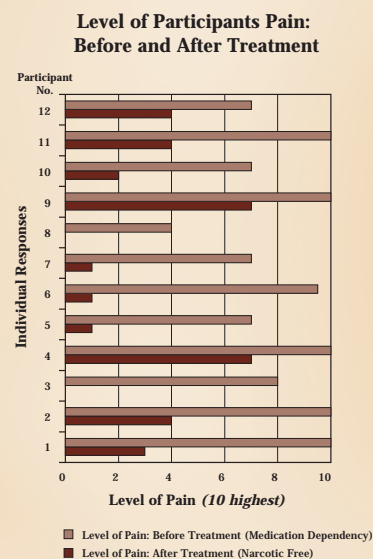
Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center (LLUBMC) offers a specialized program for those individuals addicted to their chronic pain medication. As one of the few facilities in the country offering this form of treatment, patients are awarded unprecedented care by a multi-disciplinary team specifically trained to meet the unique needs of the patient. During the program, patients receive a complete continuum of care including inpatient, outpatient, and continued support groups. Throughout treatment, patients and their family members attend a variety of groups for education on physical and emotional pain as well as develop coping mechanisms and leisure skills. All aspects of the individual are addressed and cared for including the mind, body, and spirit in order to provide meaning, purpose, and hope in their life.

### Abstract

This qualitative study examines the experiences of individuals with chronic pain in their attempt to find meaning in the presence of continual pain. Twelve participants at Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center were interviewed. Emerging themes from this study show:

1. Meaning is initially defined as the ability to engage in productive activities and positive relationships.
2. Chronic pain is perceived as the element that removes meaning from the lives of its sufferers.
3. Medications are used to cope with both physical and emotional pain leading to addiction.
4. Addiction results in greater loss of meaning.
5. Rediscovering meaning takes place through a more complex understanding of self. This occurs through the treatment process making it possible to explain the interrelation of pain, emotion, and addiction.

### Research Results



### Participant Comments

*"I think it's extremely important to understand yourself. About day three in detox I realized I didn't have any physical pain whatsoever. The pain I had been treating was the mental pain, depression, and the fact that I had been stuffing my emotions for so long."*

*"After the pain, I was limited to what I could do ... I was very cognizant of what my limitations were."*

*"I have limitations and I have to accept those limitations."*

*"I have absolutely turned my life over to the care of God. Completely! If you don't know how to deal with it [life's troubles] and you don't know what to do, you pray ... you don't do anything except pray and wait for answers."*

*"Seems like the more that I tried to control it (the pain) when I first got here, the pain hurt more because I was holding down all of my feelings and stressing."*

### Conclusion

For most, the rediscovery of meaning occurs through the treatment process that embraces spirituality. Eight of the twelve participants believe spirituality became an important component in coping with their pain. Examination of the interviews showed that spirituality enabled these participants to achieve a change of attitude, thinking, and perceptions of chronic pain. Meaning is rediscovered when they arrive at a better understanding of themselves in relation to pain, emotion, and addiction. The outcome of this study revealed the importance of incorporating spirituality into the treatment process of chronic pain and medication dependent patients.