COGNITIVE FUNCTIONAL THERAPY FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF A 36 Y/O FEMALE WITH PERSISTENT BACK PAIN AND MODIC CHANGES TYPE 1

Kasper Ussing\(^a\), Per Kjaer\(^b\), Peter O’Sullivan\(^c\)

\(^{a}\)Spine Centre of Southern Denmark, Middelfart, Denmark, \(^{b}\)University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark, \(^{c}\)Curtin University, Perth, Australia

**Background**
Chronic low back pain represents a complex interaction of structural, cognitive, emotional, social, physical, neurophysiological and lifestyle factors (Figure 1).

Modic changes type 1 are reported to be associated with low back pain and resistant to care.

Cognitive Functional Therapy (CFT) targets underlying modifiable negative cognitions and pain behaviors contributing to pain sensitivity, pain related distress and disability in an individualized manner. To date the role of CFT in patients with Modic changes type 1 has not been explored.

**Purpose**
This case study describes the CFT management of a patient with persistent low back pain with Modic changes type 1.

**Case**
**Interview**
A 36 year old female with right sided LBP, insidious onset six months earlier.

**Aggravating factors:** Sitting, forward bending positions, exercise e.g. exercise bike.

**Cognitions:** Relaxing her spine out of lordosis could damage her spine. Fearing that something was wrong with her disc and pelvis.

**Emotions:** Pain anxiety, fear of structural damage and frustration.

**Lifestyle:** Inactive.

**Social distress:** Divorce and financial stress.

**Co-morbidity:** Previous history of depression.

**Goals:**
- **Short term goal** - play with her son, house work.
- **Long term goal** - exercise in order to reduce weight.

**Physical examination (PE)**
Postural and movement examination during sitting and forward bended activities. Modifying these behaviors reduced her pain (Figure 3).

**Palpation:** sensitized at L5/S1
**SLR:** 90/90
**Neurological:** NAD
**BMI:** 39

**Radiology:**
- **MRI scan** (Figure 2): L5/S1: Modic changes type 1, facet joint arthrosis, and severe disc degeneration.

**Neurological:**
- **Sensitized at L5/S1**

**Table 1 Outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Post treatment</th>
<th>12 months follow up</th>
<th>20 months follow up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back pain (NRS 0/10)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leg pain (NRS 0/10)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability RMDQ (%)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophising (0-10)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety (0-10)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression (0-10)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of movement (0-10)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General health (0-100)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment satisfaction</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>very satisfied</strong></td>
<td><strong>very satisfied</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Management**

**Making sense of pain:**
Outline vicious cycle of pain and disability (Figure 4)

**Exposure with pain control:** (Figure 3)
She was guided to posture and move in a relaxed way without protective guarding to enhance pain control. Exposure to previously avoided movements (bend and lift) and activities (house work, playing with her child and physical activity).

**Physical activity:** Ride her bicycle daily with relaxed spinal posture.

The follow up sessions (3 in 8 weeks) focused on building confidence in the new movement and postural strategies.

**Goals:** Playing with her child, house work and exercise.

**Outcomes**
See table 1

**Discussion**
- Negative pain cognitions and behaviors are provocative of pain and disability.
- May interact with Modic changes type 1 via mechanical loading of pain sensitive structures.
- CFT helped make sense of pain, enhanced pain control and returned her to valued activities.
- Persistent LBP associated with Modic changes type 1 may be amenable to CFT.
- Further research is needed.

**Limitations**
Conclusions regarding direct causality cannot be made and natural history could have biased the outcome.

**Conclusion**
This case highlights the possible relationships between negative cognitions, fear and pain provocative behaviors linked to sensitized spinal structures.

**Figure 1**

**Figure 2** MRI scan, sagittal plan, T2: Modic changes type 1 and severe disc degeneration at L5/S1.

**Figure 3** Changing provocative postural and movement behaviors.