

Improving the self-management of chronic pain: COping with persistent Pain, Effectiveness Research in Self-management (COPERS)

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Many people live with long-term pain in joints and muscles (chronic musculoskeletal pain). Drug treatments may have problems or be ineffective and so other strategies, including supporting people to cope better with the different aspects of the problem ('self-management'), are appealing. In this research programme we sought to answer the question 'Does a self-management support programme improve outcomes for people living with long-term musculoskeletal pain?'.

First we needed to develop the best possible support programme. We started by looking at what is already known about best practice for such programmes, including how to make such programmes accessible. Based on this we developed the COPERS course, a group course spread over 3 days in 1 week with a follow-up session 2 weeks later. The groups were run jointly by a health professional and a person with experience of living with chronic pain. We tested the acceptability of the COPERS course by delivering it to both English- and Sylheti-speaking (Bangladeshi) groups.

We then tested adding the COPERS course to best usual care for people living with chronic musculoskeletal pain. We recruited 703 people from east London and Coventry/Warwickshire with an average age of 60 years. We found that the COPERS course did not improve how pain affected people's function, the outcome that we were most interested in. It did, however, provide a worthwhile reduction in depression in participants with symptoms of depression. This may be important as many people with long-term pain also have depression. The COPERS course also appeared to be cost-effective. Overall, the COPERS course is highly likely to represent good value for the NHS.

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