

# Experiencing COMFORT: A qualitative study of virtual non-pharmacologic consultations for adults with chronic pain using opioids



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## INTRODUCTION

The rate of opioid overdose deaths continues to be an important public health concern, with more than 841,000 deaths since 1999 and 70% of drug overdose deaths involving an opioid in 2019<sup>1</sup>. Chronic pain remains an avenue for exposure to long-term opioid use and its associated risks<sup>2</sup>.

The COMFORT (Community-engaged Options to Maximize and Facilitate Opioid ReducTION) study was piloted by a community opioid task force in the Inland Northwest with two aims: to increase access to non-opioid, non-pharmacologic strategies for chronic pain management, and to increase use of these interventions. Limited by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the study offered multidimensional pain management sessions via telehealth including yoga, massage, chiropractic, and physical therapy.

At the conclusion of the six-week study, participants completed an exit interview using open-ended questions to assess their experiences.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How do adults with chronic pain describe their experience of participating in a virtual nonpharmacologic pain intervention?

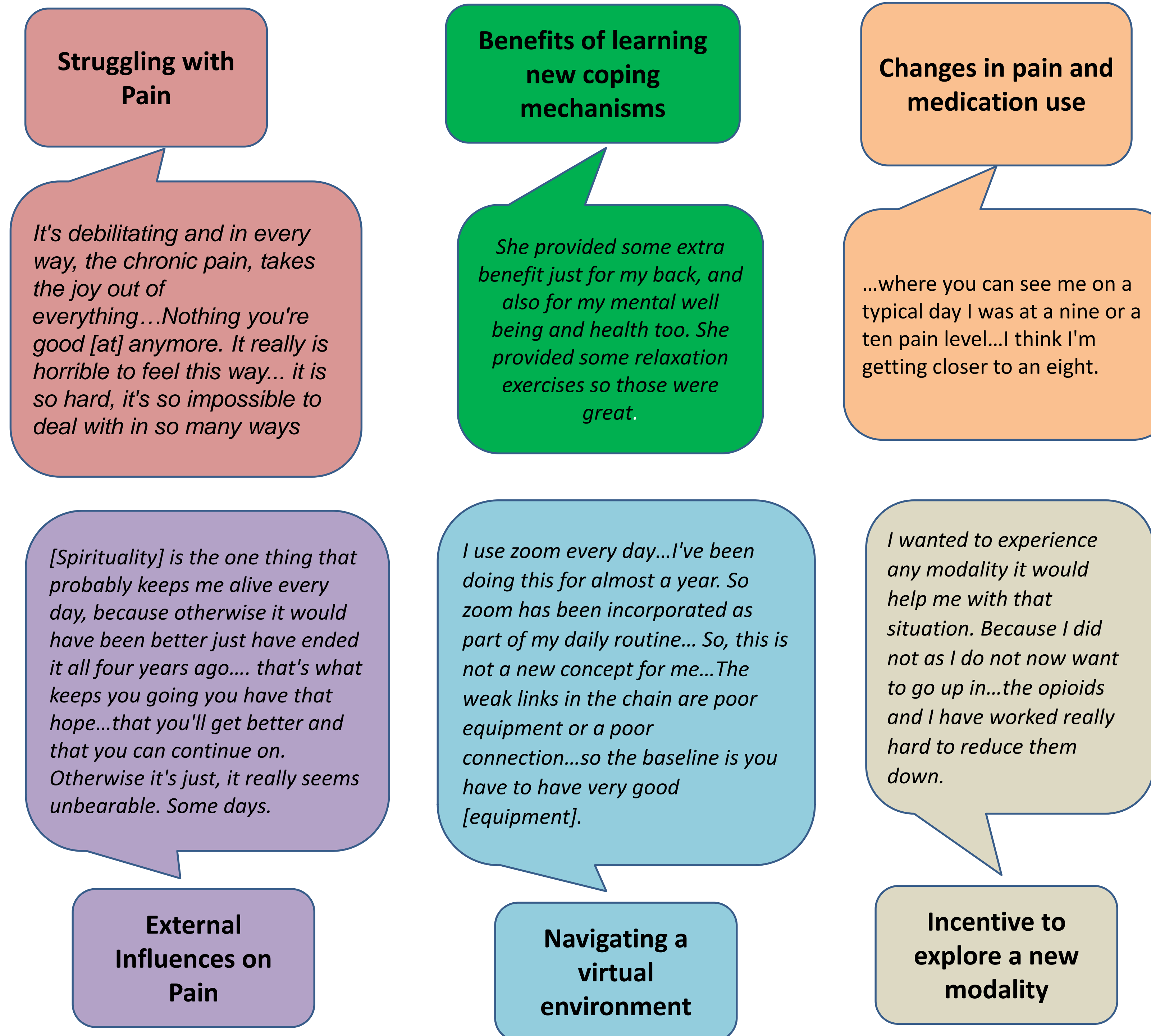
## METHODS

A qualitative descriptive analysis was conducted to describe experiences of adults prescribed opioids for chronic pain following six weeks of a virtual pain management intervention (N=15). Data was collected during an exit interview administered to participants who had completed all six sessions. A qualitative content analysis methodology with content analysis<sup>3</sup> was used to analyze data.



## RESULTS

A total of 15 of 16 participants completed a total of six weekly consultations with two therapies of their choice. Six main categories were identified to describe participants' experiences:



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## POSTER HIGHLIGHTS

- The number of deaths due to opioid use continues to grow and solutions to aid in the treatment of chronic painful medical conditions are needed.
- Nonpharmacologic options such as yoga, massage, physical therapy and chiropractic therapies may offer another way to meet this need.
- Benefits of consultations included education on new pain relief techniques, stress management and improvement in pain
- Patients were receptive to virtual delivery of nonpharmacologic consultations for pain.

## DISCUSSION

Main category findings included discussion of participants' ongoing struggles with pain and changes in pain and medication use, with participants indicating their pain did not change or improved. Some also indicated that their pain medication usage decreased. Most participants indicated that they learned new techniques for pain management, and several reported the new techniques were complimentary to their present coping strategies for pain. An important finding was the participants' openness to this novel intervention to improve their pain, which supports further development of virtual interventions to address unmet needs. Most participants indicated that spirituality was an important factor in their pain management strategy and future research could further explore this connection.

## CONCLUSION

Participants were open and willing to explore new treatment modalities for addressing their unmet pain needs. Virtual sessions may be an important intervention to increase access to complementary and integrative health options.

## REFERENCES

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