

CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Is Your Heart Feeling Blue?

Pain is Not a Location. It is Where the Hungry Heart Lives

Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



“I hurt and I am so tired of this pain!” said Jacqueline, a strikingly attractive woman in her mid-40s, as she sat down for her first psychotherapy session. “My head hurts, my heart aches, my muscles are sore, my thinking is fragmented, and there’s a heaviness in my arms and legs. I feel pulled down, as though an elephant is sitting on my chest. I have no energy; I’m like a rag doll. I am so tired of always hurting and feeling blue. Sometimes, I just can’t face another day so I stay in bed. I feel like I am falling apart.”

Chronic pain of the kind that Jacqui is describing above affects more people than cancer, diabetes, heart attacks, and strokes *combined*. It is often accompanied by depression (as in Jacqui’s case), which can include fatigue, anxiety, mood changes, loss of appetite, and sleep problems. The quality of life experienced by sufferers is often lower than that of many people with major illnesses, holding them back from fully engaging in life. This leads to damaged relationships and even loss of employment – traumas which only intensify the chronic physical pain. It’s a vicious cycle. And it continues until the sufferer begins to look *inside* for answers, as Jacqui did — fortunately.

Meeting of Mind and Body

For years, mind and body have been seen (and treated) as separate entities. This view, however, discounts the authority that each of us has over managing our own health and well-being. Today, this has changed and there is a growing understanding of the interconnectedness between mind and body, and we are witnessing a transformation in medical care that recognizes a strong relationship between physical and emotional well-being.

Jacqui’s story illustrates this mind-body connection. Growing up, she was always the “striver,” “achiever,” and the “caretaker” of the family. She did everything for everyone, and got validated for doing that, so it became her identity. She connected with others by doing *for* them and making life better — for *them*. She was always the “good girl” who graduated at the top of her high school class with awards and honors. She describes her father as an “authoritarian, take-charge man,” but not affectionate or demonstrative. “I wanted so much to please him.” Hungry for his elusive acceptance and approval, she followed his demands that she should “do a little bit better.” From her mother she learned how to ignore her own needs and feelings and go numb or limp and lose her sense of self.

When her father died suddenly, Jacqui started to fall apart, literally. Now, her great longing for his approval would never be fulfilled. She felt deadened, empty, and alone. “I thought I was dying from the inside out,” she said. The resulting chronic pain and depression became her wake-up call to refocus her energy and build a sense of *Self*, recognizing that approval was now “an inside job.”

What gets heard gets healed!

“Growing up I felt a huge emptiness — like I’m a nobody screaming, somebody love me; somebody tell me who I am!” Pain and suffering are the body’s ways of talking, telling us that something is not okay. When our body-mind speaks, we need to listen! When symptoms show up in the body, it may come from an internal wisdom desperately trying to get heard. In a therapeutic environment one can learn tools to listen, to communicate, and to navigate into the depths of that intuitive wisdom. The body speaks and when in pain, we are forced to listen and acknowledge it.

Pain and suffering can also trigger a creative transformational healing, challenging our often unrecognized attachments to toxic core beliefs that have been negatively affecting our health. In a therapeutic setting, there are innumerable opportunities for insight about the meaning of one’s condition and one’s life.

The tool box for soul is listening between the lines with an empathic ear.

Cognitive and behavioral therapies, for example, teach pain patients how to avoid *fearful anticipation*, banish *discouraging thoughts*, and adjust routines to *ward off physical and emotional suffering*. Psychotherapy helps depressed patients *tell their stories* and describe their experiences of pain and how it is related to other problems in their lives. Medicine now understands the reality of interactions among psychological, neurological, and hormonal influences that link pain and depression.

Physical therapists provide *exercises*, not only to break the vicious cycle of pain and immobility, but also to help relieve depression. More and more studies show that how we perceive our outer reality is communicated through the messenger cells of our body and magically transformed into a language of affect and energy that is recognized by others. What is the message that our body-mind sends out to those in our world? Is it the message intended?

If what you are thinking and doing is affecting your health, why stay stuck? Begin to identify and unlock old hurts, release old behavior patterns that weigh you down or cause pain and suffering. A broken-hearted melody can learn to play a different tune.



Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

New Workshop: Boundaries and Relationship Dynamics, March 28, 2015

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Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

PSY22909

16055 Ventura Blvd. #1129

Encino, CA 91436

www.drgelt.com

818.501.4123