Navigating Ethical Challenges for Pediatric Sickle Cell Pain Management in the Context of the Opioid Epidemic: Where do Pediatric Psychologists Fit in?

Overall summary and relevance to conference theme:
Sickle cell disease (SCD) is an inherited blood disorder that primarily affects racial/ethnic minorities and is characterized by acute, painful vaso-occlusive episodes (VOE) for which opioids and other analgesic medication are often prescribed[1]. As youth with SCD age, they may develop chronic pain in addition to VOE, adding to the complexity of pain management in this population[2]. Research has also demonstrated a racial bias in pain perception and treatment, where Black or African American individuals are perceived as experiencing less pain than non-Hispanic Whites and consequently receive inferior treatment for pain symptoms[3,4]. Additionally, studies have indicated perceived racial bias[5] and disease-based discrimination[6] are common among the SCD population. Furthermore, requests for opioid analgesia by patients with SCD may be misconstrued by medical providers due to concerns for drug-seeking behavior, despite evidence that the prevalence of substance abuse in the SCD population is no different from the general population[4,7]. Health disparities in socio-economic status, insurance coverage, and access to high quality care[8], along with high rates of neurocognitive impairment[9], increase the risk of negative health outcomes among youth with SCD.

These issues raise ethical concerns about medical providers’ approach to pain management in pediatric SCD[10,11]. The opioid epidemic has complicated ethical decision-making by exacerbating pre-existing stereotypes and misperceptions among this already vulnerable population[12]. Recent national guidelines limiting the total recommended daily opioid dose, though not directed at those with SCD, puts this population at further risk of experiencing injustice and inadequate treatment regarding pain management. A crucial role of pediatric psychologists is providing psychoeducation to medical teams and supporting patient advocacy.

The proposed workshop will be conducted by two pediatric psychologists, one pediatric neuropsychologist, and one pain management physician and include presentations on: 1) patient perspectives on racial bias/stigma related to pain management in pediatric SCD, 2) ethical implications of the opioid epidemic on medical providers’ pain management practices and their impact on pediatric SCD, 3) ethical issues related to neurocognitive vulnerabilities in pediatric SCD, 4) the application of the integrated ethical framework for pain management[13] to pediatric SCD. Four, complex case examples will be presented to facilitate small group discussion/practice in identifying ethical issues in and applying the framework above to pediatric SCD pain management, followed by a brief, large group discussion. Two-person role-plays will be used to practice intervention strategies aimed at provider education and patient advocacy. DirectPoll and educational videos will be used to facilitate interactive learning.

Based on the content of this talk, participants will be able to:
1. Describe challenges related to the pain management in pediatric SCD from the patient perspective.
2. Recognize ethical implications of the opioid epidemic on the medical provider’s management of pain in pediatric SCD.
3. Discuss ethical issues related to the neurocognitive vulnerabilities of the pediatric SCD population.
4. Apply the integrated ethical framework for pain management (Carvalho et al., 2018) to pediatric SCD.
**Target Learner Level:** Intermediate

**Registration cap:** 50 attendees

**Presenters:** Siddika Mulchan, PhD, Emily Wakefield, PsyD, Lauren Ayrvolta, PhD, William Zempsky, MD, MPH

The proposed workshop will include didactic presentations for the first 65 minutes incorporating interactive learning (e.g., technology, multimedia content). Next, attendees will be divided into four groups and participate in small group discussions with a facilitator/presenter for 70 minutes to gain practice in: 1) identifying ethical issues/dilemmas in four complex pediatric SCD case examples (40 minutes) and 2) applying the ethical framework presented to one of these case examples (30 minutes). A large group discussion for 15 minutes about attendees’ experiences during small group discussions will follow. Then, attendees will participate in role-plays for 20 minutes to practice intervention strategies aimed at provider education and patient advocacy. Questions will be reserved for the remaining 10 minutes.

All presenters are actively involved in multidisciplinary clinical work and research/program development with the pediatric SCD population. Dr. Zempsky is well-known and widely published for his work in SCD and pain management.

**COI Statement:** None

**Session Date/Time:** Thursday, March 19th, 8:00am-11:00am

*The Society of Pediatric Psychology (Division 54 of the American Psychological Association) is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. The Society of Pediatric Psychology maintains responsibility for this program and its contents.*