

# Medically Unexplained Symptoms Beginner Workshop June 14<sup>th</sup> 2017

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# MUS in a Nutshell

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- Pain or other physical symptoms are caused or amplified by psychological/emotional processes and not primarily due to any disease or damage of the body's organs or structures
  - “cannot be explained by traditional medical models” (Kenny and Egan, 2011).
- Common emotional processes linked to these symptoms include the long term physiological and psychological impact of adverse childhood experience, current life stresses, post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety
- Common symptoms include: back pain, tension headaches, migraine, irritable bowel syndrome, chest pain, chronic pelvic pain, fatigue and fibromyalgia.
- These conditions can be helped effectively by accurate diagnosis and treatment of the underlying behavioural, psychological and emotional issues

# Precipitating Events to MUS

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- 35% - Death or Illness of a loved one
- 30% - 'Other' Stressful event e.g moving/having children/work conflict
- 18% - Accident or Illness of self
- 12% - Relationship Breakdown

# Contemporary MUS Approach

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- Aim is to move from an idea that pain is a marker of tissue damage or disease to...
- **Pain as a signal** that something emotionally stressful is happening which causes the body's nervous system to overreact. Patients are usually unaware of what the emotional triggers are and so assume a disease process
- The pain, induced by the brain, is serving a psychological function, often to both express AND distance from the emotional pain underneath and stop it from rising up into consciousness
- Instead of experiencing painful feelings, the person is experiencing anxiety or symptoms in the body
- Contemporary research suggests that understanding and manipulating processes underlying the emotional suffering should be more successful in treating MUS, as compared to the standard approaches that have been tested for decades.

# Somatic Pathways of Emotions

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- Rage: upward from feet to ears to arms: moves out anxiety
- Guilt: content is remorse, solid waves, chest/neck pain, can't talk
- Grief: content is loss, softer, waves: not physical pain
- Love: warmth in chest, urge to embrace