

Appendix 2 – Sean’s Story

‘Sean’s Story’ is a video that tells the story of Sean Jennings from Cornwall who had a hernia operation 25 years ago and due to an infection, ended up suffering chronic pain. For many years, Sean was taking large doses of opioids which presented numerous side effects and yet he still suffered from continued chronic pain. The film shows how long-term use of high-dose opioid prescribing had a devastating impact on his quality of life and how non-drug therapy has been life changing for Sean.

As the pain continued to get worse without relief from opioids, Sean asked his GP to be put on a pain management programme. The pain management programme is specifically designed to help patients develop appropriate long-term coping strategies for living with long term pain.

Sean said: “Every day I was taking more and more painkillers, and I thought I was all right, but I really wasn’t very well. I realised that I wasn’t functioning properly and sought further help from my GP as I just couldn’t cope. He put me on the pain management programme and that changed my life.”

Through alternative therapies such as mindfulness and meditation, Sean has been able to deal with his pain without the reliance on opioids to manage. The film aims to encourage and inspire patients with chronic pain to seek alternatives to prescription opioids to help deal with their condition.

Sean added: “I learnt how to exercise gently and do a little bit of Tai Chi and mindfulness. To start with – mindfulness, I didn’t understand that but, as a sceptic, it works. I’m 18 months now without taking opioids, no gabapentin, nothing for pain whatsoever. The pain hasn’t gone away – it’s simply the way I deal with it now, and I do this through mindfulness.”

The film is also aimed at medical professionals to encourage them to consider incorporating psychological therapies into their patient’s care when they are prescribing opioids for pain. It aims to highlight the over-medication of some patients and to consider referrals to pain management courses which are widely available.

Dr Jim Huddy, who leads on chronic pain at Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “What we’re hoping for is that Sean’s story can implant what you might call a lightbulb moment for people who are in a similar situation with chronic pain, on high doses of opioids and who haven’t considered that there could be another way to manage their pain and lead their lives.

“For prescribers, I sympathise with the time-constraints and the pressures that we have in consultations. Chronic pain consultations are really challenging, and patient expectations can sometimes be high. They expect a prescription and to start the process of changing that can be really difficult. So, we totally understand why doctors often reach for the prescription pad. Hopefully that will slowly change, but it will be a slow change.”

NHS England SouthWest Medical Director, Dr Michael Marsh, said: “This film aims to highlight to prescribers, such as GPs, and to also make patients aware that there are alternatives to opioids to help deal with chronic pain. By integrating psychological therapy with physical health services, the NHS can provide a more efficient support to this group of people with chronic pain and achieve better outcomes.”

To view the film, [click here](#)