**Fibromyalgia syndrome: the essentials**

**What is fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS)?**

- FMS is a medical condition that causes widespread pain, fatigue and difficulty concentrating
- It is multifactorial with neurophysiological, immunological and cognitive elements
- It responds poorly to conventional treatments, including medicines and injections
- It is best managed with an individualised multi-element support plan

**What to look for**

- Pain treatment is ineffective – 'nothing works'
- Significant distress
- Multiple symptoms over time
- Other conditions such as IBS, headache, abdominal or pelvic pain
- Pain out of proportion to what would usually be expected

**Screen for other pathologies**

- History and examination:
  - rheumatological, endocrine or neurological conditions
  - obstructive sleep apnoea
  - chronic fatigue syndrome/ME
  - depression
- Review and examine medication
- Lab tests based on clinical suspicion, but should include:
  - full blood count
  - ESR/C-reactive protein
  - urea and electrolytes (U&Es)
  - liver and bone profile
  - creatinine kinase
  - blood glucose
  - thyroid stimulating hormone
- Remember: FMS is not a diagnosis of exclusion; it can also coexist with other conditions

**How to diagnose**

- Ideally, carry out a face-to-face assessment
- Symptoms should be present for >3 months
- Use ACR (American College of Rheumatology) criteria to aid diagnosis
- Use symptom severity index (SSI)* to score fatigue, concentration, refreshment from rest and presence of abdominal pain, depression and headache
- Use widespread pain index (WPI)* to score pain in four body quadrants plus axial region
- Does it sound right? ie not unilateral or upper/lower body pain only
- Symptoms cannot be explained by any other conditions

**What to say**

- First of all, listen, supportively
- Share information and signpost to links
- Share decisions on management and support planning
- Help coordinate an individualised support plan based on goals and skills

*FMS diagnosis requires a WPI score ≥7 and SSI score ≥5 or WPI 4–6 and SSI ≥9, with pain in 4/5 body regions

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www.rcp.ac.uk/fibromyalgia-guidelines