Workers' Comp

Could Virtual Reality Be the Next Treatment for Chronic Pain?

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Author profile image

Julie Black

Director, Clinical Services

Is virtual reality (VR) the latest tool to help fight chronic pain? A recent FDA approval suggests VR treatment may be part of the expanding use of technology for medical treatments.

On November 16, 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized a prescription-only treatment of chronic back pain utilizing a virtual reality system. EaseVRx aims to use a VR headset and the principles of cognitive behavioral treatment (CBT) to help reduce pain and pain interference through breathing exercises and improved awareness of internal signals. .

The EaseVRx program consists of 56 VR sessions that are 2-16 minutes long as part of an eight-week treatment program. The FDA authorized EaseVRx based on an eight-week study of 179 people with chronic, low back pain that had lasted six months or longer. Half of the participants used the EaseVRx program and the other half participated in a two-dimensional virtual reality program that did not use CBT methods. According to the FDA "At the end of treatment, 66% of EaseVRx participants reported a greater than 30% reduction in pain, compared to 41% of control participants who reported a greater than 30% reduction in pain." The reduction in pain remained for up to three months after the study for people in the EaseVRx group but not for the control group.

Over the last decade, digital therapeutics have become more commonplace, undergoing review and being cleared or approved by the FDA. The EaseVRx system could possibly be used as an alternative to medications, such as opioids, for chronic back pain. Research has shown that CBT may reduce the burden of chronic pain and increase function through an emotional, cognitive and behavioral approach to shift negative beliefs held by patients about the relationship between their pain and movement. As we continue to learn more about the possibilities of virtual reality and the benefits of CBT, the industry may see more interest in alternative treatment methods like EaseVRx.



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