



University of Washington Clinical Learning, Evidence and Research (CLEAR) Center

CLEAR Center Webinar

Understanding the validity and utility of pain assessment rating scales: A 40+ year journey

Speaker: Dr. Mark P. Jensen



**Thursday
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11 AM-12 PM PST**

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Summary of talk:

In this webinar, Dr. Jensen will summarize the findings from a long-lasting (40+ years) and ongoing research program to understand the validity and utility of pain assessment rating scales.

This program began with an initial study, published in 1985, to compare the validity (defined as the association between what was argued to be a gold-standard measure of experienced pain – the factor score from a factor analysis of multiple pain intensity measures) of six commonly used rating scales in a sample of 75 individuals with chronic pain.

That study supported the two numerical scales (a 0-100 scale and a 0-10 scale) as being more valid than the VAS (visual analog scale), which was thought to be the most valid measure at the time. Subsequent research in different pain samples conducted in the USA confirmed this finding, as well as a conclusion that more than 21 response options (e.g., as could be assessed by a 0-10 scale, which allows for responses every 0.5 points such as 3.5 or 6.5) do not necessarily provide greater precision. Research conducted in the last decade suggests that numerical scales may be less useful in some populations,

including individuals with limited education and limited numeracy (e.g., individuals in Nepal who have less than a primary school education); for such individuals, FACES scales may be most appropriate.

As a group, this research program supports the conclusion that no single pain rating scale is most appropriate for all populations. The most recent study in this program of research is to determine whether it is possible to crosswalk among all of the most commonly used measures to a single metric. If so, this would allow any of the existing scales to be used in any population, and therefore allow the findings of studies that use that measure to be directly compared to the findings from studies using different scales in different populations.



Mark P. Jensen, PhD

Dr. Jensen is a Professor in the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine at the University of Washington who has been studying chronic pain and its assessment for over 40 years. He has had continual funding from the National Institutes of Health and other funding agencies to study the efficacy and mechanisms of psychological pain treatments. He has published extensively (12 books and over 750 articles and book chapters) on the topics of pain assessment and treatment, and was the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Pain for 12 years, from 2010 through 2022.