



UNHELPFUL LANGUAGE

Based in part on the work of Sherri Weiser, PhD



WHAT YOU SAY



WHAT THE PATIENT HEARS

Your MRI shows degenerative disc disease/ disc bulge/ arthritis/ bone spurs/ spondylosis, etc	I will never get better
Your MRI shows wear and tear	My spine is worn out
Your MRI shows a disc tear	I have a severe injury to my spine
You have damage	I have a severe injury to my spine
You have a chronic condition	I will never get better
There's nothing wrong with your back	He/she thinks it's all in my head
Stop when you feel pain	Activity will harm my back
Let pain be your guide	The pain is in charge; I'm not
Take it easy and rest	I should avoid all activity
You should be able to work	He/she thinks I'm faking
You need pain medication and injections	Making the pain go away is my only hope
Pain is normal for someone your age	I am going to get steadily worse as I get older
You need pain control	The pain is a vicious monster that has to be controlled
If you have pain when you go back to work (or exercise) stop working (or exercising)	Any pain I feel when I go back to work or exercise means I have re-injured myself
The goal of treatment is for you to be pain-free	Anything short of that goal means failure
Your pain is psychogenic or psychosomatic	He/she thinks my pain is not real
Your test findings are negative	Negative? That must be bad
Don't worry	There must be something to worry about
You are going to have to live with this	My life is ruined
I cannot prescribe opioid medications	I am being denied the treatment that will make me feel better



HELPFUL LANGUAGE



WHAT YOU SAY

Your MRI doesn't show anything to worry about

Your MRI shows normal things that come with aging, like gray hair

The cause of your pain may not show up on an MRI

Increasing activity as tolerated will help

Your back problem should respond to nonsurgical care

Self-treatments and exercises are the most important aspects of spine care

Medication and injections are sometimes helpful so you can get more out of the self-treatments and exercises

Having pain at times is a normal part of life but it can almost always be managed

I'm confident in your ability to overcome this

Working (or exercising) will not cause damage to your back, even if you have some pain while working (or exercising)

Together we can help you overcome the pain

Some pain on getting back to work is normal and usually fades as your body adapts

The goal of treatment is for you to learn to manage and overcome your pain

Stress might increase your experience of pain

Your pain is persistent, but you can overcome it

If you make some changes, you can enjoy life despite any pain you may have

Opioid medications are not going to help your pain in the long run and will cause you more problems



WHAT THE PATIENT HEARS

There's nothing seriously wrong with my back

Those scary-sounding words are nothing to be afraid of

My pain is real

Activity is good for me

I probably won't need surgery

I can take charge of this

Self-treatment and exercises are the keys to recovery

The pain doesn't *have* to go away; I can learn to take charge of it

I have a better chance of recovery than I thought

I will be able to return to work/ exercise

Pain is not a vicious monster; it is something I can move beyond; I am not alone in this

Pain doesn't necessarily indicate re-injury

I may or may not be pain-free, but I can cope with it and get on with my life

My emotional experience may impact my physical symptoms

The pain does not have to go away for me to get better

I can get my life back

These are not good medications for me