

Project: **Outpatient Radio: A chronic pain listening project**

What was the challenge?

The experience and inadequate treatment of chronic pain affects as many as 100 million Americans, costing an estimated \$560–635 billion a year. Individuals living with chronic pain in rural areas often have limited access to health education and resources, and face significant economic, social, and public health challenges as well. In Shasta County, California, about 320 kilometers north of the UC Davis campus, the median household income in 2014 was \$44,556, significantly lower than the state median of \$61,489. Further, Shasta County's population is older than that of California overall (approximately 18% of Shasta County residents are seniors over 65 compared to 12% statewide), and the rate of suicide is roughly twice the rate of California. Shasta County is especially susceptible to the opioid crisis; in 2013, the rate of opioid prescriptions (number of opioid prescriptions per 1000 people) was more than double the California rate, and hospitals in this region saw more than 1,100 overdose cases between 2006 and 2013, or three times California's average.

What was the solution?

Outpatient Radio is a chronic pain listening project produced by the Center for Design in the Public Interest at the University of California, Davis. Our partners include Hill Country Health and Wellness Center, a nonprofit community clinic, and community radio station KKRN 88.5 FM in rural Shasta County, California. Weaving together the stories of eight chronic pain patients, the hour-long show seeks to combat the stigma and isolation of chronic pain, improve understanding of the many issues surrounding chronic pain, and spark new conversations in the North State community through grassroots radio programming. Outpatient Radio advocates with those who have a limited voice in

public life by amplifying an often-unheard community: chronic pain patients in a remote rural area.

Over a period of a year and a half—from research, early ideas, and Institutional Review Board discussions to partnership building, participant recruitment, interviews, editing, and production—we were driven by a deep desire to listen, experiment, and learn. Our research focused on several key questions, including:

- How might individuals living with chronic pain, especially in more isolated, rural areas, benefit from sharing their stories?
- How might community radio help break down barriers of “otherness,” sickness, or disability?
- How might audio stories and the act of listening change how chronic pain patients experience their own health?

We worked closely with clinicians at Hill Country and at UC Davis Health to understand the complex issues surrounding chronic pain and pain treatment, including patient demographics, treatment challenges, access to care, and the role of mental health. We completed a literature review to learn more about chronic pain, narrative medicine, and community radio, analyzing and synthesizing what we discovered in order to further guide our research and share it among team members. We looked into practices for working with vulnerable communities and researched qualitative interviewing methods, holding mock interviews and participating in a training workshop developed specifically for our design team by a former producer at StoryCorps. Most importantly, we spoke with community members themselves to understand and chronicle the nuances of living with chronic

pain and how it deeply impacts the lives of individuals, caregivers, friends, family, and neighbors.

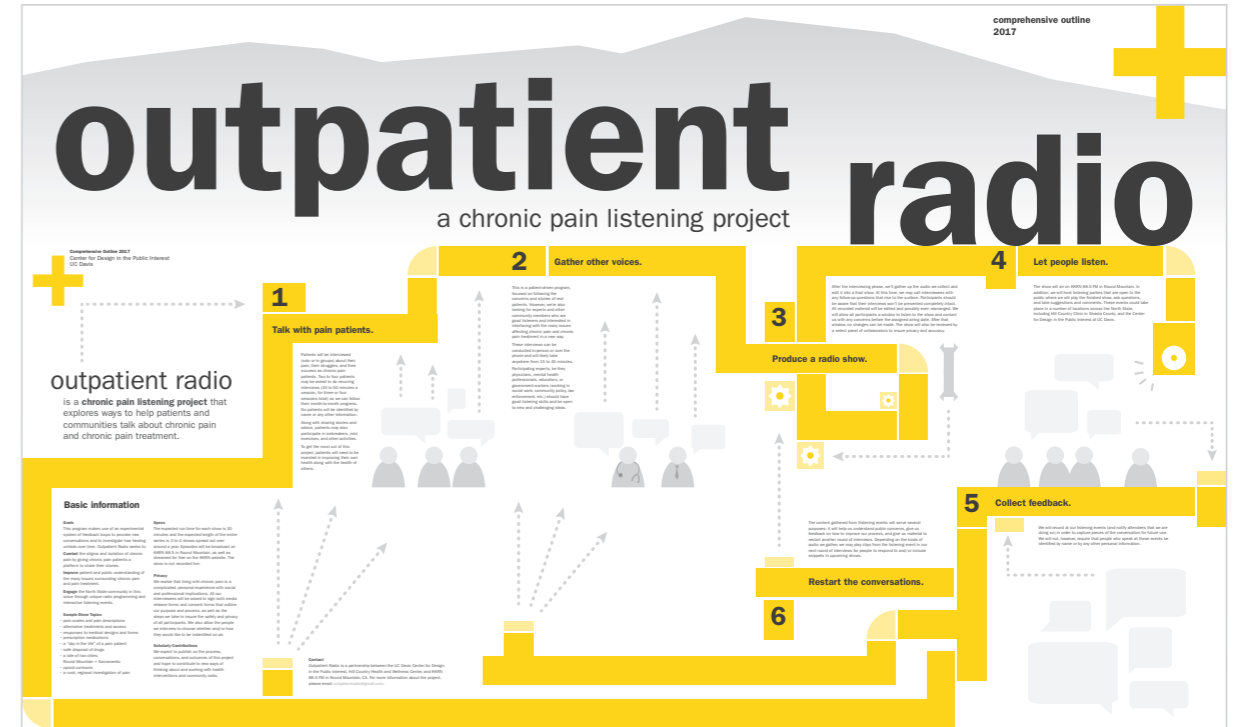
What was the effect?

In rural areas where individuals with chronic pain have limited access to health education and resources, Outpatient Radio broadcasts empower patients, community members, and healthcare providers to listen and to share stories and knowledge in more connected ways. Participants have responded with feedback about the benefit of having had a safe space to reflect on their health and the opportunity to share their experiences in a way that might help others. The show has aired twice on community radio station KKRN (88.5 FM) in Shasta County and on KDVS (90.3 FM) in Davis, California. Almost 600 listeners have accessed the show on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/MBrvnTVYeeM>). It is also available in the web archives of both radio stations and on public health websites including UC Davis Health and Sacramento County Department of Public Health.

Outpatient Radio was recognized with an inaugural San Francisco Design Week Award in 2018 and with an Honorable Mention in the Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED) Awards, an international juried competition celebrating excellence in Public Interest Design.

Project team

Outpatient Radio is produced by the Center for Design in the Public Interest (DiPi) at the University of California, Davis. Team members include Susan Verba, Tracy Manuel, Kenna Fallan, Bo Feng, George Slavik, Hannah Hill, and Zoe Martin. Partners include Hill Country Health and Wellness Center and community radio station KKRN in Shasta County, California; clinicians at UC Davis Health; museum-



A poster that folds into a booklet provides a visual roadmap to engage stakeholders and participants in the project (above). Tracy Manuel at work on Outpatient Radio (left). YouTube album art (right).

based public health partnership Art Rx in Sacramento, CA; and individual participants in Redding, Round Mountain, Sacramento, and Davis, California.

About DiPi

The Center for Design in the Public Interest (DiPi) at University of California, Davis was founded to explore the question: “What does democratic design look like?” At DiPi, the power of design is applied to problems that affect people’s health, wellbeing, and daily lives. DiPi partners

with researchers, clinicians, and community members on projects that include opioid education, health literacy, and emergency preparedness. Our work is public domain so everyone benefits.

Outpatient Radio is part of DiPi’s flagship effort, the Pain Project, which seeks to understand and address problems in pain communication by redesigning existing tools and creating new ones, both with and for healthcare providers and patients. Our materials are available to use, adapt,

and share under a Creative Commons license. Visit <http://dipi.design> for more information and to access downloadable resources.

Contact

Susan Verba
Center for Design in the Public Interest (DiPi)
University of California, Davis
sverba@ucdavis.edu
<http://dipi.design>