

# Postgraduate Certificate in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Headache Disorders

(PG Cert. CBT)

A physician-focused training program for neurologists and other clinicians who want to integrate evidence-based CBT techniques into headache and facial pain practice.

6 months

60+ hours

Online + in-person

This brochure presents the complete structure, curriculum, assessment pathway, faculty framework, and application details for the WHS-IIP joint training program.

*Designed for physicians who want a stronger behavioural toolkit for headache and facial pain care.*

# Program Overview

## EVIDENCE-BASED INTEGRATED CARE

### The program

This joint program by the World Headache Society (WHS) and the International Institute of Psychotherapy (IIP) is designed to equip neurologists and headache specialists with advanced, practical skills in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for the management of headache disorders. The curriculum bridges neurological expertise and evidence-based psychotherapeutic intervention, enabling physicians to deliver integrated, patient-centered care. Graduates will be certified to provide structured CBT sessions as part of a comprehensive headache treatment plan.

### What this course certifies

Participating neurologists and physicians complete structured training in CBT for headache disorders and are equipped to integrate these techniques into specialist clinical practice. The emphasis is on real-world headache and facial pain care: assessment, formulation, psychoeducation, relaxation strategies, cognitive restructuring, pacing, and relapse-prevention planning.

### Why this course matters

For clinicians, CBT is not simply counselling. It is a structured, evidence-based set of skills that can help reduce headache burden, improve disability, strengthen self-efficacy, and address the stress-sleep-behavior patterns that commonly perpetuate migraine and chronic pain.

When physicians understand these tools, they can integrate them more intelligently into specialist care, reinforce adherence, and collaborate more effectively with psychologists and pain teams.

### Who should consider applying?

Neurologists, headache specialists, and physicians who want a stronger evidence-based behavioral toolkit for headache and facial pain practice.

### Course highlights

Designed for physicians and specialists

Integrates neurology, pain medicine, and psychotherapy principles

Focus on headache and facial pain disorders

Online foundation phase plus in-person intensive

**Practical, protocol-based, clinic-ready learning**

# Learning Objectives

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO DO

Upon successful completion of this program, participants will be able to:

1

Articulate the biopsychosocial model of headache disorders and the evidence base for CBT in headache prevention and management.

2

Conduct a comprehensive CBT assessment for patients with headache and facial pain disorders.

3

Formulate a cognitive-behavioral case conceptualization linking thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms, and behaviors.

4

Deliver core CBT techniques, including psychoeducation, relaxation training, cognitive restructuring, and behavioral activation/pacing.

5

Develop and guide patients through a structured multi-session CBT protocol for headache, such as 8-10 session models described in the literature.

6

Manage the therapeutic process, monitor progress, plan relapse prevention, and integrate CBT skills into existing neurological practice.

## Competency arc

The objectives move from theory to assessment, from formulation to technique, and from supervised application to confident integration in headache practice. The design is explicitly clinic-facing and skill-oriented.

Understand

Assess

Formulate

Intervene

Supervise

Integrate

# Audience, Prerequisites & Structure

## SIX-MONTH TWO-PHASE DESIGN

### Target audience

Neurologists and physician life members of the World Headache Society.

### Prerequisites

Active WHS life membership; a recognized medical degree and license to practice; basic familiarity with the psychological aspects of pain is recommended but not required.

### Program structure and duration

The program is delivered in two phases over six months, totaling over 60 hours of structured learning.

#### Phase 1: Foundations

#### Months 1-5

Immersive, Online, synchronous (2 hrs/week)

Theoretical foundations, skill acquisition, and observed practice through role-plays.



#### Phase 2: Intensive

#### Month 6

In-person (10 hours total)

Advanced skills, complex case management, and direct feedback on clinical competence.

### Delivery approach

The curriculum combines didactic teaching, live demonstrations, breakout role-plays, case discussions, assignments, supervised practice, and direct feedback. It is intentionally designed to bridge theory and real clinic application.

# Detailed Curriculum - Month 1

## PHASE 1 ONLINE FOUNDATION COURSE

### Month 1 The Foundation of CBT for Headache

Immersive half day (5 hours) in-person training at the WHS Summer Symposium, followed by structured online learning.

#### Immersive foundation

- Introduction to the biopsychosocial model of headache.
- Psychophysiology of stress and pain: interaction between stress, muscle tension, and headache.
- Evidence base for behavioural interventions in migraine and other headache disorders.
- Core principles of CBT.
- The cognitive model: thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and physical sensations are interconnected.

#### Weeks 2-3

- Introduction to the Mind: Integrating neuroscience and physics (Dr. Pravin Thomas).

#### Weeks 4-5

- The initial CBT assessment.
- Structuring the first session: building a therapeutic alliance and setting an agenda.
- Functional analysis of headache triggers and consequences.
- Introducing the headache diary as a core self-monitoring tool.

#### Weeks 6-8

- Case formulation and goal setting.
- Developing a shared understanding of the patient's headache experience through a CBT lens.
- Collaboratively setting SMART goals for behavioural therapy.

### Month 1 outcome

Participants finish the opening month with a conceptual grounding in headache-focused CBT, a first-session structure, and a shared case-formulation mindset.

# Detailed Curriculum - Months 2 & 3

## BUILDING THE TOOLBOX AND COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

### Month 2 Building the Behavioral Toolbox

#### Weeks 9-10

- Relaxation training (Part 1).
- Theoretical basis for relaxation in headache management.
- In-session practice: diaphragmatic breathing and its physiological effects.
- Guided practice: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

#### Weeks 11-12

- Relaxation training (Part 2) and behavioral activation.
- Advanced techniques: guided imagery and visualization for pain management.
- Behavioural activation: pleasant activity scheduling to improve mood and reduce pain focus.

#### Assignment 1

Participants record themselves guiding a standardized patient (or colleague) through a PMR or breathing exercise and submit it for peer and instructor feedback.

### Month 3 Cognitive Strategies and Pacing

#### Weeks 13-15

- Introduction to cognitive restructuring.
- Identifying cognitive errors and negative automatic thoughts related to pain and disability - for example catastrophizing and overgeneralization.
- Using Socratic questioning to gently challenge unhelpful thoughts.

#### Weeks 16-18

- Advanced cognitive techniques and activity pacing.
- Developing balanced, adaptive thoughts.
- The boom-and-bust cycle of activity in chronic headache patients.
- Teaching pacing strategies to manage energy and prevent headache exacerbation.

**By the end of Month 3, participants have a working behavioural and cognitive toolbox they can begin to adapt to real headache consultations.**

# Detailed Curriculum - Months 4 & 5

## CONSOLIDATION, SUPERVISION, AND PRACTICE

### Month 4 Consolidation and Advanced Skills

#### Weeks 19-20

- Integrating skills and managing comorbidities.
- Review of relaxation, cognitive restructuring, and pacing.
- Adapting CBT for patients with comorbid anxiety and depression.

#### Weeks 21-22

- Stress management and assertiveness training.
- Teaching general stress management principles.
- The role of assertiveness in preventing stress-related headaches, including learning to say no.
- Reviewing the structure of a full 8-10 session CBT protocol.

### Month 5 Preparation for Practice and Supervision

#### Weeks 23-24

- Managing therapeutic process and endings.
- Addressing homework resistance and missed sessions.
- Preparing patients for therapy termination: reviewing skills and developing relapse-prevention and maintenance plans.

#### Week 25

- Integrating CBT into neurological practice and supervision preparation.
- Practicalities: documentation, billing/coding (if applicable), and time management.
- Introduction to the supervision process for the practical assignment.

#### Assignment 2

Participants submit a complete written case formulation and treatment plan for a patient they will see during supervised sessions.

# Phase 2 - In-Person Intensive

## HANDS-ON SKILL REFINEMENT AND DIRECT FEEDBACK

This final phase spans one day and focuses on hands-on skill refinement and direct observation. Total contact time: 10 hours.

### Module 1

#### Complex Case Presentations (2 hours)

- Interactive discussion of challenging cases brought by participants.
- Troubleshooting specific clinical problems such as medication overuse headache and highly distressed patients.

### Module 2

#### Live and Video-Based Skill Practicum (4 hours)

- Participants conduct live CBT sessions with simulated patients or present recordings of supervised sessions.
- Direct, constructive feedback from IIP faculty and WHS peers.
- Focus on cognitive restructuring in action, psychoeducation, and relaxation scripts.

### Module 3

#### Advanced Techniques and Integration (2 hours)

- Brief overview of related techniques such as biofeedback and mindfulness, and how to refer for them.
- Deeper dive into the neurobiology of CBT and how interventions can shape neurophysiology.

### Module 4

#### Certification Review and Final Q&A (2 hours)

- Final review of core competencies.
- Open forum for remaining questions on protocol, supervision cases, and integration into practice.

## HOW COMPETENCE IS DEMONSTRATED

### Assessment and certification

To achieve certification, participants must complete all three components below:

1

#### Formative assignments

Satisfactory completion and submission of Assignment 1 (Relaxation Recording) and Assignment 2 (Case Formulation).

2

#### Supervised clinical practice

Provision of at least five structured CBT sessions to a patient with a headache disorder, under the supervision of an approved IIP supervisor via recorded sessions or detailed process notes.

3

#### Final evaluation

Successful demonstration of core competencies during the in-person intensive practicum, as evaluated by the joint WHS-IIP faculty.

### Award on completion

Upon passing all components, physicians will be awarded the "Postgraduate Certificate in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Headache Disorders."  
*This certifies that they have completed the training and are equipped to integrate these techniques into their specialist practice.*

### Faculty

- Lead Neurologist (WHS): medical accuracy and headache-specific relevance.
- Lead Psychotherapist (IIP): fidelity to CBT models and supervision of clinical skills.  
Guest Faculty: experienced CBT practitioners specializing in pain management.

### Assessment philosophy

The certification process is intentionally longitudinal: participants demonstrate learning through assignments, supervised care, and live competence review rather than through a single written test.

# Fees & Application

APPLICATION ESSENTIALS FOR THE 2026 INTAKE

## Total fee

**USD 750**

## For Indian candidates

**INR 57,999 + GST**

Seats are limited and allocated on a first-come basis.

## How to apply

Email: [info@worldheadachesociety.org](mailto:info@worldheadachesociety.org)

### Attach

- Degree certificate
- National ID proof
- WHS Life Membership

## Key dates and availability

Seats available: **24 only**

Application deadline: **26 March 2026**

Format: Online foundation + in-person intensive

**A focused pathway for physicians who want to bring structured CBT skills into headache practice.**

World Headache Society x International Institute of Psychotherapy