



Dr. David Hanscom

## Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

An interview with John Gribbin  
on Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom

Podcast Date: February 12, 2020  
© 2020, David Hanscom, M.D. All rights reserved.

### IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER: THIS DOCUMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE MEDICAL ADVICE

Information, including but not limited to, text, graphics, images and other material contained in this document, is for informational purposes only. The purpose of this document is to promote broad consumer understanding and knowledge of various health topics. The information in this document is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, opinion, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or treatment and before undertaking a new health care regimen, and never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this document. You should also ask your physician or other healthcare provider to assist you in interpreting any information in this document or in applying the information to your individual case. This document does not recommend or endorse any specific tests, physicians, products, procedures, opinions or other information that may be mentioned herein. Reliance on any information appearing in this document is solely at your own risk.

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

- Tom Masters: Hello, and welcome back to another episode of **Back in Control Radio** with Dr. David Hanscom. I'm your host, Tom Masters, and our guest on the program today is John Gribbin, Founder and CEO of **Curable Health**. Welcome.
- David Hanscom: Thank you, Tom. We're delighted to have John back on the show. We talked to him last week about his journey out of chronic pain. He's the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of **Curable Health**, which is an application (app) that I knew about three years ago. John is an extraordinary businessman. He knows how to make things available to people who need them, and he's been very successful in creating a workable app helps thousands of people improve as they move out of chronic pain.
- He has a group of people who themselves all came out of chronic pain successfully, so the app is built in a way people really do respond to, and with which they do well. I'm very excited to have him back on the show. If you missed his first podcast with us, check it out for details about John's dramatic and inspiring journey and work in the world of chronic pain. John, welcome back.
- John Gribbin: Thank you. It's great to be here again.
- David Hanscom: I'd like to start with a focus on what you are doing now. How did the company form, and who are your partners? Then we can discuss what you have to offer, what your mission is.
- John Gribbin: Sure, I'm happy to explain all of that and more. We started the company in 2016. I mentioned last episode that it was born out of our own experience with, in my case, pretty long-term persistent pain, and then in my partner's case—they had pain for quite some time as well as non-pain symptoms. ***And so, we all had a personal experience with.... or each, I should say, had a personal experience with overcoming our symptoms and changing our relationship with our symptoms through knowledge, through learning, through a mind-body approach to pain.***
- Before we started the company, we did our market research and said, okay, that might've been my experience, but is this legitimate? We had to define what happened that improved chronic pain dramatically?
- And we looked out there and saw that so much of the mainstream literature, neuroscience and medical literature, now points to the fact that the brain indeed does govern many of these symptoms more than we once thought. And so, we realized our personal experience was actually a scientific experience, and that perhaps it was time for us to jump in and try to spread the word and get this message out and get these tools out to more people like ourselves.
- David Hanscom: You originally started, basically, with migraine headaches. Is that correct?

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

- John Gribbin: We did, yes. When you start something from scratch, all you have are hypotheses. You have very little facts. You have a bunch of tests that you want to run and ideas that you want to prove. And one of those hypotheses was that previous efforts to spread the word about a brain-body approach to pain, they fell flat because they cast too wide of a net. And what I mean by that is this. I had back pain for 15 years, but there wasn't one day in that 15 year period that in my mind, I thought I had chronic pain. That chronic pain was for my grandmother. I was a back pain guy. And so, you're attached to your diagnosis or you're attached to your pain. And you don't know that they're all connected or rooted in the same point of origin, as a layperson.
- John Gribbin: One of our hypotheses was, what we call it, meet people at their diagnosis. Like, yeah, we know that the same types of stressors and things can cause back pain and hip pain and migraines, but patients don't know that. And so, let's go and meet them with messaging that is needed in and after diagnosis. So one way to do that would be to... even though the first version of the Curable app had all the same science and education and lessons and activities that it does now, that can help with all types of pain symptoms and non-pain symptoms. Even though that is true, let's package it in a way that it just speaks to one subset of the pain population, migraine. And we chose migraines because it's a large subpopulation in the US, and my partner, Laura, has personal experience with migraines.
- David Hanscom: Right. Now, I want to jump clear ahead to the current moment. Your app now covers chronic pain, which there are many manifestations to chronic pain. Basically, it's a sensitized nerve system, both from repetition and also really unpleasant or adverse body chemistry, putting you on high alert. They call it hypervigilant nervous system. And I'm regressing, I looked at your app recently, but you have pretty much now covering chronic pain period, regardless of which part of the body it is in. Correct?
- John Gribbin: Correct. And that is something that needs to be... We explain that on the very front end. What the app is, is a large collection of education and self-care. So there's audio, five, 10 minute audios that you learn about neuroscience. There's writing lessons for 20 minutes. There's meditation. There's all these types of activities that somebody can do, but it's at the very front of it. What we're trying to communicate is exactly what you just said, which is, look, I know that you experienced knee pain, and it's about your knee. I'm sure I've been told there's structural damage in your knee. Yes, yes, yes. But let's talk about how your knee pain might be related to maybe some other symptoms that you have, or symptoms that other people have in other parts of their body and try to connect those dots like right out of the gate.
- David Hanscom: Right. People have to remember that basically pain goes to... Excuse me, basically pain goes just to a certain part of the brain. It doesn't matter if it's your knee, your back, your big toe, your brain is assessing all of the sensory input, then it says danger and sends out a signal. So it doesn't really matter which part of the body that it starts in. It also doesn't matter the source of the pain,

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

whether it's inflammation or a structural problem, et cetera. We also know in about six to 12 months that your brain simply memorizes the pain. Again, Phantom limb pain is sort of the classic example, where the leg is actually gone, you still feel the pain. What's that about? We learned that in medical school, and I always wondered why that wasn't discussed for, but essentially your brain has memorized the pain. Again, it can be in any part of the body. And you can't operate on a leg that isn't there.

We find that it doesn't matter where the pain started from, once your brains memorized it, it's chronic pain. So we also know that the brain also becomes inflamed. The glial cells and the supporting cells actually become inflamed themselves. So the treatment has to focus both on the structural problems and on the receptor, which is the nervous system of the brain.

So that's why there's so many different manifestations of chronic pain because it's essentially all the same thing. We've also found out, even with surgical lesions, when we have big bone spurs in the spine, that you can rewire your brain around almost anything. The last five years of my practice, we had over a hundred patients with severe big bone spurs on the surgical schedules. And we just follow the data of just getting better sleep, calming people down, et cetera. They would come in for the final preoperative visit, and the pain would go away, would disappear.

So my surgical conversion rate was less than 5%. I essentially put myself out of business, even with structural problems that you could see. And it was remarkable. And I was always shocked when people walked in and cancel their surgery. And of course, in this day and age with the fee schedule became rather the awkward from a financial standpoint, but that's fine. There's actually nothing more rewarding than seeing a patient avoid surgery and get better with no risk and no cost. So it's not financially rewarding, but it's incredibly rewarding as a doctor-patient relationship to watch somebody go to pain-free without the risk of the surgery. So your app has expanded into basically, the core concept of chronic pain, correct?

John Gribbin: Yes. And just a quick question, how many other orthopedic surgeons, would you say, would have your philosophy after they put themselves out of business that way?

David Hanscom: Almost none. And the reason for that... I just went to a major conference. There's a big research grant right now. The federal government has put in something like \$500 million in the next five years of research, to find the answer to chronic pain. And we have the answer. Like I said, your app says curable. We actually have the technology based on documented effective medical interventions that are effective. We actually know how to solve chronic pain. So we're so geared towards a structural source. I went to this one workshop around the research ongoing and we're researching the exact same things that haven't worked. It was unbelievable. So I'm not being critical orthopedic surgeons or the surgeons in general, but that's the way we're trained. And it's

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

once you have that paradigm in your head, is hard to change it. So we're fixated on structural sources, structural sources.

There's a paper in Chicago that shows that in six to 12 months, the pain stems from the back pain center, let's talk about back pain for a second, it shifts to the emotional center in about 12 months. The pain center goes dormant. You have the same pain, but a different driver. The current definition of chronic pain is that it is an embedded memory that becomes connected with more and more life experiences, and the memory can't be erased. And so, the solution is, once you have in this memorize. You can't unlearn how to ride a bicycle, but you can reprogram your nerve system around those permanent circuits. And as you use the new circuits more, and the other ones less, they start to atrophy. It's like learning a new language. You're not going to learn French by trying not to speak English. You have to learn how to speak French. So the new language, I call an enjoyable life. You're not going to solve the chronic pain by trying to fix it, you're going to shift your brain into this enjoyable life and move forward. So it's a huge paradigm shift and you are correct, essentially, no surgeons really follow this philosophy. But it's the way we're trained, including myself.

John Gribbin: Understood. And that I understand that. Yeah.

David Hanscom: What's been your experience as far as working with the medical profession about how they receive this whole process?

John Gribbin: Even over the course of three years, since we launched the art company and their Curable app, I've seen a shift and a positive one. It started in PT from our perspective, in that we would get a lot of early outreach from physical therapists saying, what is this resource? This is so cool. I'd love to offer this to my patients while they're doing some of the mechanical work. I think a lot of PT education is now centered around neuroscience and the brain's role. So they're learning this stuff, the good ones are at least. And so now, they're like, okay, we learn it, but how does the patient do their homework in between each weekly session? Well, Curable, let's do some brainwork through Curable.

We saw PTs come first and then frankly, Dr. Hanscom, I've been surprised, but also warmed, I guess, by the fact that there's been outreach from a lot of different areas over the past year or two as well. So lot from primary care, a lot from academia. We have relationships with some very serious academic institutions, Stanford and UCSF, and Duke and places that I think people hold in pretty high regards, smart people there. And they reach out to us and are interested in what we're doing and want to bring these concepts to their patients. So I think it's going in a wonderful direction. I don't know if it's going as fast as we want it to, but it's certainly trending in the right direction.

David Hanscom: Well, that's exciting. I'm not quite the same perspective you are as far as others, other professionals reaching out, but that's exciting. **The data shows that only 20% of physicians report being comfortable treating chronic pain, and of that group, less than 1% report being very comfortable.** But again, we went into

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

medicine to help people. The study showed that the compassion index of pre-medical students is higher than the average population. Unfortunately, it drops dramatically as they sort of get beat up by their training. But in general, their initial energy to help people is there.

We're not trained to the current paradigm; it's very, very frustrating to do things that don't work. The fact that the **Curable app** is effective for many, many people is incredibly encouraging for everybody. Do you have data yet on if a person decides to engage in the app? I think you and I both know that if you don't engage, of course, nothing's going to happen. But if somebody decides to engage with it, do you have any percentages or what the success rate is yet?

John Gribbin: Yes, we do. We measure that. I guess it depends on the definition of success, but we have defined what we deem to be success. And then we've measured that, frankly from the beginning of the company, from the beginning of the app., so three years of data now, and about 6,000 people have entered this study that we've done internally. ***So I guess just to put it into perspective, we have about a quarter million users of the Curable app.***

David Hanscom: That's great.

John Gribbin: We offer the ability to be in this internal study to every customer of ours. We've gotten about 6,000 random users—we don't hand pick. So, about 6,000 people have jumped into it.

We measure the results from the app on a rolling basis. The results from it have been incredibly consistent from the very beginning of the **Curable app** up to and including now. And that is this: at the 30-day mark of using the app, about 70% of users report physical symptom relief, and about 30% of those report dramatic symptom relief, like no symptoms at all.

So you have 30% of people feeling completely better, another 40% of people feeling better, and so, 70% feeling better overall. And then 30% just, at the 30 day, have not experienced symptom relief at that point. Now, I'm hoping and guessing that many of those folks do, after the 30-day mark.

***We measure quality of life measurements as well, around anxiety and improved physical activity.*** That number is 80% of folks, after 30 days of seeing quality of life improvements. And then 90% of all Curable app users after 30 days, they at least have a better understanding of pain and how their mind, and their life experiences are connected to their symptoms, and are feeling more empowered. *So maybe they're not running a mile yet, maybe their back pain isn't gone, but there's hopefulness there. That's in the 90%.*

David Hanscom: Well, for those of you who have some sort of disbelief, like how can you have that kind of success after 30 days? I'm excited you're documenting this. I have not had the bandwidth to do this, but it is my personal observation that *people*

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

*get better in about three to six months*, many people within weeks or days. I just got an email yesterday from a person who went to my workshop four years ago, but did not do that well at that time. But about a year ago, all of a sudden he's fine. ***So once you have the tools, it's about neuroplasticity and stimulating your brain to change.*** What I like about the **Curable app**, and also the approach I've been using with the Direct your Own Care (DOC) process, is that once you have the tools, whether you like it or not, *once you have that shift in thinking*, your brain starts to change.

And I always tell people, you don't have to believe one thing I say or we're saying. You don't have to believe it, that's not the point. ***You want to connect with what is, and just go through the process.*** You can't change your brain, but you can go through the tools and use processes that allow your brain to change. You become an observer of your own healing. And so, these numbers are not on the line. They're consistent with my personal experience. I'm very excited that you documented what's going on—that's excellent.

We don't have the time to go into a huge of detail about what the Curable app does. John and I have talked off and on for years. In the DOC project, which is called Direct Your Own Care, is my website, which is [backincontrol.com](http://backincontrol.com). And it's somewhat of a foundational body of knowledge that's pretty detailed about the evolution of chronic pain. And then, it's a framework. I always point out very clearly that my website and book are not solutions, it's a *concepts process*. It's a framework that breaks pain into its different parts. Once people see their variables in light of the chronic pain model, then they can tackle them. Then the **Curable app** is a wonderful resource to move it forward.

We are doing the same thing in different realms, different approaches. And that's where I feel like our efforts are very collaborative. John and I share a belief that the medical profession has to change, but I think it's going to be slow. I think going directly to patients and the wider public is a critical part of this whole mission.

John Gribbin: I agree with that. That's been our approach from the beginning—going straight to the patient consumer, educating them and helping them directly. That's where we came from. We **were** those people and **are** those people. And so, that's what our thinking has been, to go there first, and then, that will open up doors for conversations with other participants in the healthcare industry to improve things on a larger scale.

David Hanscom: I also think that those of us in the trenches are watching people get hurt pretty badly by interventions that have been proven to be ineffective. And I think there's a sense of urgency to get this stuff out there as quickly as possible. I think you feel the same way.

John Gribbin: Couldn't agree more. I agree. Yes.

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

David Hanscom: There's a book out of Australia called *Surgery, The Ultimate Placebo*. And the author, Dr. Harris looked at cardiology, urology, orthopedic surgery, spine surgery, and found that in every field of medicine, the same pattern of procedure, after procedure, after procedure, still being performed even when documented to be ineffective. It just doesn't work. For instance, knee arthroscopy for knee arthritis is still done quite widely. It was shown 20 years ago to *not* work, but that hasn't slowed it down at all. In Spine surgery, *not one paper documents that it works*, but that has not slowed down the rate of spine surgery at all. So you've gone through a risky, expensive procedure with no effect.

I wrote a post for my website and have reposted it several times called the *Pit of Despair*, that in primary surgery, it showed by repeatedly raising hopes, then dashing them, people become depressed, badly depressed.

So you talk about your story, John, about not having any hope. You have an intervention that seems like it's going to work. You get your hopes up. That, in of itself, actually creates quite a bit of damage. And I think you went through that yourself, personally.

John Gribbin: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it's interesting. I haven't heard of that book, but I love the title. And I sometimes think that the surgery is the... what is it— **Surgery, The Ultimate Placebo.**

David Hanscom: Yeah—remember, placebo is not a bad word.

John Gribbin: Oh, I agree. That's what we sell. We joke internally that we basically bottle up the placebo effect and put it onto the market.

David Hanscom: Right. The placebo is the most powerful drug that exists on this planet. It's your body's own capacity to heal. **And to me, the essence of solving chronic pain is connecting to your own healing capacity.** What it does... once you are connected to your own healing capacity, know how to work with it, then you feel safe. When we feel safe, your body chemistry is oxytocin, the love drug, dopamine rewards, serotonin antidepressant. So we need this chemical bath of feeling safe. Everything functions better. When you're hypervigilant and feeling stressed, then your body chemistry is really adverse, and you actually get physically sick.

So it's really about feeling safe as the ultimate goal here. And placebo is... I wish there was a different term for it because sometimes it's got a bad connotation, but it is the response that you only elicit to heal. It is what John and I do, creating a structure that allows you to figure out your own way to heal. Everybody does it differently. Once you harness your body's own healing capacity, it's just game on.

John Gribbin: I love that.

## John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now

David Hanscom: Any other final comments to the audience? Would you review how to access your resources? I think in 10 years, your company's going to be incredibly successful. It is already successful, but I'm excited that you're out there getting this message out at the level you are. I think it's phenomenal.

John Gribbin: Thank you very much. Yes. People can find us at our website, which is [www.curablehealth.com](http://www.curablehealth.com). You can also go to any of the app stores, the Apple App store or the Google Play store, to access the **Curable app**. You can also get it from our website. Our website has a lot of other free information as well, podcasts, and links, bios on our advisory board with members like you, scientific articles, and explanations on all of these topics. So there are a lot of good, free resources on our website. There is also information on some of the other things that **Curable** does outside of the app. We have, what we call, boot camps, which are six week intensive courses on specific topics, such as the depression and sleep with pain. We have Curable groups, which is our top level offering, which is a online group healing 12-week course. And so you get to learn about all that on our site.

David Hanscom: I think it's fantastic. I know you started out with a very focused level, but it's expanded rapidly. We're going after the same thing, a calming the nervous system and feeling safe. These are all techniques to get to the same goal. So I think the actual resources to translate these concepts into real life are just really excellent.

So, John thanks again. I'm looking forward to working with you further, and we'll see where it all goes.

John Gribbin: I'm looking forward to it as well. I really think that we're pushing this forward here together. So I think what's the coolest part about it, is that we're helping so many people. And it's so rewarding for that to be your job, one's job is to come to work every day and help people. So it's an incredible experience. I'm looking forward to the future as well.

David Hanscom: Absolutely. Well, thanks.

John Gribbin: Thank you for having me on.

Tom Masters: I'd like to thank our guest today, John Gribbin, the founder and CEO of **Curable Health**, for sharing information about the software apps for healing chronic pain that his company makes. I'm your host, Tom Masters, reminding you to come back next week for another episode of **Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom**. And in the meantime, be sure to visit the website at [www.backincontrol.com](http://www.backincontrol.com).

---

**John Gribbin - Have Chronic Pain? The App Will See You Now**

**Notes:** The original transcript of this episode of Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom has been edited for readability.