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Pathways to happy feet

Satisfaction with podiatric surgery by podiatric surgeons

In Australia, podiatric surgeons are specialist podiatrists who are registered to provide surgical foot and ankle procedures. The goal is to improve patients' quality of life by relieving pain and improving function. This not only involves surgery but also advice on footwear, orthotic and exercise options.

Despite many attempts to influence the public acute health sector of the value of podiatric surgery (where there are known long wait lists for orthopaedic surgery for similar procedures) most patients receive their care in day procedure facilities.

While podiatric surgery has been shown to improve health-related quality of life and is associated with low rates of complication, including non-union, infection and venous thromboembolism, patient satisfaction with surgery is relatively unknown. As a result, a study was implemented to validate anecdotal information.

The study results relate to 2014-2017, with data from four podiatric surgeons in Western Australia, noting that ongoing evaluation of satisfaction continues to inform practice outcomes. The group has expanded to five, with a South Australian surgeon now participating.

A post-discharge telephone survey consisting of seven questions was used, with results then being sent to an independent reviewer who could trigger a clinical review if required. The questions focused on satisfaction with medications needed, wound care instructions, post-operative infections and need for re-admission. The questions align with Australian Commission on Safety and Quality National Standards for infection control, medication management and comprehensive care.

Ethics approval to access and analyse the data was provided by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Patients provided verbal consent to complete the questionnaire via telephone interview. The Ethics Committee did not require written consent as the data were collected as part of routine post-operative follow-up and ongoing external peer review.

How are the data used?

The data inform opportunities for improving practices, support benchmarking between the surgeons and provide the chief executive officers of the three private hospitals where the surgeons operate with information on care outcomes.

Reports to the CEOs are not a formal requirement, but supports continuation of credentialing and privileges.

Results

596 patients

2 readmissions (0.4%).

87.5% (n=456) were highly satisfied (score 5/5).

The five most common procedures were:

1. Wedge resection of ingrown toenail
2. Correction of hallux valgus by osteotomy
3. Correction of claw toe
4. Correction of claw toe with internal fixation
5. Excision of exostosis of small bone.

Discussion

The primary reason that patients undergo podiatric surgery is to achieve relief from their foot pain which has not been resolved by other non-surgical options.

Foot pain is also known to affect more females than males. Existing evidence also suggests females are more likely to experience venous thrombo-embolism following surgery than males.

As a result, Australian podiatric surgeons are more likely to provide thromboprophylaxis for female patients undergoing surgery, to prevent potential complications.

The study did not find that patient satisfaction was influenced by gender.

The results of this study also confirm that patients were satisfied with the communication provided by their surgeon. (Communication relating to consent, understanding risks, use of antibiotics and wound care instructions has been expanded in the current survey tool.)

The ongoing independent review process has assisted in improving patient care, particularly in pre-admission and post-discharge conversations. The high response rates continue to correlate with high satisfaction. The shared learning from this work provides valid data and an opportunity to continuously improve the patient experience.

Patient satisfaction during the pre- and post-operative period also remains high.

Initiatives implemented since this study was conducted have included: a greater focus on antibiotic usage, screening for cognitive impairment; and assessing whether patients feel their care and treatment is based on a partnership approach that involves shared decision-making. ^{1a}