Reviewer's report

Title: Life impact of ankle fractures: Qualitative analysis of patient and clinician experiences

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Reviewer: Tom Sanders

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Life impact of ankle fractures: qualitative analysis of patient and clinician experiences

General:

This paper examines patients’ and healthcare professionals’ perceptions of the impact of ankle fractures on patients’ experiences, with which the authors claim a ‘condition specific reported outcome measure’ can be developed. The methods used are appropriate for the questions that the authors seek to examine. My overall view is that the paper provides an overly descriptive account of patients’ and health professionals’ views, with what appears to be a largely predefined thematic framework. I am not sure what the paper adds to the qualitative literature, or to the evidence base on ankle fractures, other than to use as a springboard for developing a patient reported outcome measure to test out on a larger patient population. Having said that, the findings do provide at least ‘new’ evidence on the views of patients and HC professionals specifically in relation to the impact of ankle fractures on patients’ experiences. Though this is not examined in sufficient depth.

Background

The paper reports some demographic literature on the incidence of ankle fractures, and states that there is little empirical research literature specifically on ankle fractures, patient recovery from ankle fractures and their rehabilitation. However, this does not mean to say that relevant literature on fractures or recovery from injuries causing fractures does not exist. Moreover, there is a case for examining the conceptual distinction between recovery from fractures generally, ankle fractures, and other types of orthopaedic problems, to provide a context for an analysis of ‘ankle fractures’. In this sense there is no justification for why ankle fractures, rather than knee dislocations, shoulder injuries or other types of musculoskeletal problems are important to investigate. Also, as ‘pain’ seems to be a central tenet in the respondents’ experiences, it would seem logical to review some of the literature on musculoskeletal pain more broadly.

Methods

More information on respondents would be helpful. For instance, age, sex, cause of the ankle fractures etc. The method of recruiting patients is not described, so we cannot deduce who agreed to participate and who declined, and why. What
was the response rate? The interview questions are divided into three very broad topic areas, which seem to be asking one very general question e.g. ‘life impacts’ immediately following ankle injury, after 6 months, and at the present time. However, the authors then claim that respondents were asked to describe the treatment received and rehabilitation. These questions seem to be very clinically focused. I was therefore wondering about the specific questions patients were asked in relation to their ‘life impacts’ (not just the clinical impacts). However, we are not told anything about the interviews with health professionals, or for the choice of these particular groups of clinicians/health professionals. More information on the questions that were explored with HC professionals is needed.

The analysis section claims that data saturation was reached following 10 interviews, though that may be because the questions covered a narrow spectrum of issues? Could the authors elaborate on why they reached saturation after only 10 interviews?

Findings

The findings are presented logically, and the authors opted to describe the findings from health professionals alongside those of patients. The themes however are very descriptive and the authors go into little depth explaining their meaning for the management of patients with this type of injury/complaint. I also thought that there was limited discussion of the impact of the time since the injury on patient experiences and HC professional approaches to their management. Also, not much was made of the specific causes of the ankle injury on patient responses.

The conceptual framework that the authors aimed to develop, does not appear very conceptual. They report socio-demographic domains that do not seem to come from their data, but precede it. For this reason they do not provide new insights into patients’ experiences of ankle fractures, but report quotations that reflect the broader predefined domains eg. psychological, financial, social etc. These do not, in my view, constitute novel themes that contribute to the conceptual development of the data.

Discussion

Some of the discussion is speculative eg. ‘variation is likely due to a range of factors…..’ (p. 18). The discussion does not develop the overall argument far enough, other than make a case for the future development of a patient reported outcome measure. However, other factors of more immediate concern to patients and HC professionals, such as the issue of ‘pain’ seemed to be important, but again not examined in much detail.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests