Abstract:
Examining the Psychological and Emotional Experience of Sexuality for Men after Spinal Cord Injury

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Background: Sexuality is an important contributing factor to achieving satisfaction with one’s overall quality of life (QOL).

Literature regarding sexuality for men with spinal cord injury (SCI) has focused primarily on physical factors, however the psychosocial aspects may be more important for achieving satisfaction with sexual life in this population.

Objective: Examine the psychological and emotional components of sexuality for men with SCI to reveal the main concerns from both a patient and health care provider perspective.

Methods: Study I: In-depth phenomenological interviews with six men living with SCI. Study II: Delphi method involving an expert panel of 20 men with SCI who did not participate in Study 1 interviews to verify themes identified in Study I interviews. Study III: Delphi method involving an expert panel of 10 health care providers who work with men who have SCI to determine whether their perceived concerns are similar to the actual concerns of their patients.

Results (Study I): A new meaning of ‘sexuality’ emerged placing less emphasis on any one physical act and more importance on emotional closeness with a partner. Men who identified as adopting this view of sexuality reported a superior sexual experience and level of intimacy than prior to injury, whereas men who had not identified as adopting this view of sexuality reported lower levels of sexual interest and sexual satisfaction. Men reported that resources were inadequate to support sexual adjustment after SCI and emphasized the importance of sexual education post-injury.

Significance: With advancements in medical and rehabilitative practices, patient life expectancy is now comparable to the able-bodied population. Research must now address important areas affecting QOL that have been under-studied for patients with spinal cord injury, including sexuality. Identifying the psychological and emotional concerns will help guide future rehabilitation initiatives and may potentially lead to better supports for men with SCI.