

Patient's Perceptions and Utilization of Physical Therapy after Orthopaedic Surgery

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INTRODUCTION: Formal Physical Therapy (PT) traditionally has been a critical part of postoperative recovery after orthopaedic surgery but due to recent cost containment efforts in health care and bundle payments, the coverage for formal PT has become limited. As access to physical therapy is threatened, alternatives to formal PT have been proposed, including telerehabilitation, internet-based PT, and even home-based physician-guided PT. The purpose of this study was to understand patient perceptions of PT, the benefits, perception of improvements, access to PT and alternative forms of PT after shoulder surgery.

METHODS: This cross-sectional study used an anonymous survey of 80 orthopedic surgery shoulder patients at a single institution. The variables collected included demographics, access to PT, number of PT sessions, insurance, copayment, patients' perceptions of improvement, and their opinion about internet-based PT (IBPT). Answers were designed using Likert-scale or multiple-choice questions. Descriptive statistics were used to report survey data. Analyses were performed based on demographic variables using independent t-test, chi-square tests, and an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

RESULTS: Patients attended an average of 16 ± 13.8 PT sessions with a perceived $65\% \pm 32.2$ average improvement attributed to their sessions. The average copay was $\$18 \pm 20.8$ per session, which 56.14% agreed or strongly agreed that it was reasonable. Sixty five percent of patients perceived improvement in their condition attributable to their physical therapy sessions and 94.8% of patients agreed or strongly agreed their therapist took the time to educate them. When asked about IBPT, 52.5% disagreed that successful PT could be achieved by IBPT. There were also 68.6% of patients who responded that they would not consider using IBPT even after a few in-person sessions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: Patients have a positive perception of their therapist, cost, number of sessions, and utility of PT to impact their improvements following orthopedic shoulder surgery. As cost containment remains a priority, it seems that for internet-based PT to be a viable alternative this will require integration and close engagement of a physical therapist, given patient's perception and values on the impact of in person formal PT.