

Update 85

Chiropractic and Phantom Limb Pain amongst People with Lower-limb Amputation

Phantom limb and residual limb pain are common after a lower limb amputation. For most, the pain is episodic and not particularly disabling. However, for a notable subset, the pain may be quite disabling. It has been suggested that pain after amputation should be viewed from a *broad perspective* that considers *other anatomic sites* as well as the impact of pain on functioning. (1)

Authors from the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, recently carried out a descriptive survey (2) aimed at examining the types and relative frequency of treatments used for lower-limb phantom limb pain, including both pharmacologic and what they termed 'rehabilitative interventions'.

The authors report having carried out a community-based survey based on data drawn from clinical databases. Their community-based sample consisted of 255 individuals with lower-limb amputations. The primary outcome measure of interest was intensity of phantom limb pain and type and helpfulness of treatments (both past and present) used for Phantom-limb pain.

The authors report that although 72% of the sample reported suffering phantom limb pain at the time of the survey, 53% of the respondents had never used treatment for phantom limb pain.

The most commonly used treatment modality was analgesic medication, including acetaminophen, opioids, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. Of the treatments surveyed, only opioids and **chiropractic care** were rated as moderately to extremely helpful by the majority of those who had tried them, and many pain interventions had been discontinued.

The authors conclude,

"As hypothesized, a significant proportion of persons with phantom limb pain have not used treatment for this pain, and, among those who have used pain treatments, few treatments are perceived as substantially helpful. More research is needed to identify effective management strategies for phantom limb pain and to examine further patient perceptions of treatment."

ASRF Chiropractic Update Editor's comment - Interestingly previous cross-sectional surveys have shown that spinal problems are "...surprisingly common in persons with lower limb amputations, and, for some who experience it, may greatly interfere with function" (3).

References:

1. Ehde DM, Czerniecki JM, Smith DG, Campbell KM, Edwards WT, Jensen MP, Robinson LR. Chronic phantom sensations, phantom pain, residual limb pain, and other regional pain after lower limb amputation. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2000; 81:1039-44.
2. Hanley MA, Ehde DM, Campbell KM, Osborn B, Smith DG. Self-reported treatments used for lower-limb phantom pain: descriptive findings. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2006; 87:270-7.
3. Ehde DM, Smith DG, Czerniecki JM, Campbell KM, Malchow DM, Robinson LR. Back pain as a secondary disability in persons with lower limb amputations. *Arch Phys Med Rehabil* 2001; 82:731-4.