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Using Interviews to Understand Patients' Post-operative Pain Management Educational Needs Before and After Elective Total Joint Replacement Surgery

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Objective: To better understand the education needs of patients electing to have TJR in managing their pain in the post-operative period after discharge from the hospital.

Methods: An exploratory, descriptive, qualitative design. Convenience sample of people who reported that they had not received information about pain management prior to TJR surgery were recruited from 9 surgeon practices in 8 states to participate in telephone interviews, utilizing open-ended questions. Questions included: recollection of pre-op class attended and content; experiences with surgical pain after surgery and how it was managed; experiences with pain medicine; experience using non-medicine related pain reduction methods; suggestions for delivery of pain management information. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data were categorized using content analysis techniques.

Results: Seventeen patients were interviewed. Although all remembered attending a pre-operative class prior to their joint replacement surgery, none remembered receiving information during that class about managing pain once they were discharged. All had been prescribed an opioid for pain management post-operatively; however no patients reported receiving any information regarding use of the medication other than the information on the pill bottle. Many had concerns regarding the use of opioids to control their pain, including side effects, such as constipation and the risk of addiction. The most common non-medicine method used to manage pain was the use of ice. Participants believed that information about pain management, including both non-medicine approaches and instructions for taking opioids would be helpful and should be delivered at multiple time points, including pre-operatively, at discharge, and within the first few days after discharge.

Conclusion: With trends toward shorter hospital stays, home based pain management is a priority. Understanding the pain management education needs of patients considering elective TJR could inform interventions for this population as well as provide insight into the needs of other patients undergoing surgery.

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