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What management approaches do physiotherapists select when assisting patients to manage phantom limb pain?

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Purpose

In 2012, the CSP highlighted several research priorities in physiotherapy services including investigating treatment modalities for patients with phantom limb pain (PLP). PLP incidence is reported to affect 60-90% of people after amputation.

Objectives

The primary objective was to identify the current available management options for PLP being prescribed in clinical practice by physiotherapists. The research investigated if treatment selection differs between physiotherapy banding, NHS or private and if guidelines are used.

Methods

Mixed method approach. All participant completed the same 17-question survey that covered physiotherapy demographic information, PLP treatment selection and clinical reasoning for treatment selection. The survey was advertised via BACPAR, PACE and CSP and completed anonymously. Results were analysed via thematic analysis and a chi square test conducted on a proportion of data.

Results

18 treatment modalities were identified. 10 different primary/preferred treatments selected. No statistical significance between NHS/private and treatment selection. Four themes emerged for clinical reasoning of treatment selection.

Conclusion

Despite a small sample size a range of treatment modalities were identified for PLP management. The research highlights the need for an individual tailored approach to PLP management and indicates further research is needed to develop guidelines and knowledge on effectiveness of varying treatment selections.

Implications

These research provides therapists with a range of treatment modalities to manage PLP.

Keywords Pain, Phantom limb pain, Amputee