

PHYSICAL THERAPY VIEWS

April 2010

ELECTIVE SURGERY—WHO WILL RESPOND WELL?

As the [comparative effectiveness](#) agenda continues to gain momentum, elective surgical procedures will be scrutinized with a focus on how much it costs to obtain the final results.

Surgeons can't depend on palm readers to psychically predict the outcomes from elective surgery. Is it reasonable to assume diagnostic tests, combined with pre-operative laboratory tests and cardiac screening results, are sufficient enough to increase the likelihood of favorable outcomes from the procedure? If the main rationale is to decrease the risk of mortality, probably yes. But what about life after the procedure? The patient lives, which is great, but did the surgical procedure add value and improve health status/quality of life?



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Personally, I am overwhelmed with the results of various studies. Take for example the work done by [Street et. al. 2005](#), where they found differences in outcomes after total hip arthroplasty which were dependent upon length of time of duration of symptoms and location of pain. Those who underwent a total hip arthroplasty with predominant knee symptoms had poorer outcomes. [Riddle et. al. 2010](#) reported that pain catastrophizing

was the only psychological factor predicting poorer pain outcome via the Western Ontario and McMaster Osteoarthritis Index. According to [Nwachukwu et. al. 2010](#), racial and ethnic minority groups may have different outcomes than the majority.

Surgeons will do all they can do in the choices they make prior to and during surgery. What about after surgery?

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Where can you find more information?

- [comparative effectiveness](#)
- [Street et. al. 2005](#)
- [Riddle et. al. 2010](#)
- [Nwachukwu et. al. 2010](#)

WHAT ABOUT AFTER SURGERY?

In my opinion, what happens after surgery is key to achieving successful outcomes. Guidelines and protocols help provide gentle guidance in the progression of activities, but there is so much more to achieving successful outcomes than following a guideline or protocol. Physical therapists have a definite role in helping achieve successful outcomes.

For some reason, the majority of patients have unrealistic expectations. I tend to think the unrealistic expectations stem from less and less invasive techniques... but any surgery is invasive. Paper cuts hurt, so do minimally invasive procedures! Physical therapists are able to

spend time educating about realistic expectations and discussing a timeline of sorts so patients reduce their worry.

I know most surgeons provide patients with post-operative exercises. For quite a few patients, fear plays a role in whether they adhere to those initial recommendations. Pain and fear, combined with not knowing what is normal to feel, lead to lack of performing the exercises. Sometimes patients aren't even sure if they are performing what appear to be the easiest of easiest exercises correctly—and since they aren't sure, they don't do them out of fear of doing something wrong.

Physical therapists as a whole should be aware of various guidelines and protocols. Honestly, it isn't difficult for physical therapists to grasp progression of activities. Choosing a physical therapist who has extensive knowledge of protocols isn't the key to success. If the familiarity of post-operative conditions is not key, what is? **The physical therapist of choice is one who**
1) remembers the patient is experiencing something new;
AND
2) addresses various factors with a patient-centeredness approach.

Have you thought about who you refer your patients to after surgery? Do the physical therapists you recommend improve the likelihood of successful outcomes?



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WANT DETAILS?

If you received this newsletter via snail mail, you can venture to our website to find the PDF version. The PDF version includes hyperlinks to take you to the sources of information. It is most definitely less time consuming to click to learn more versus searching in Google.

www.redcedarphysicaltherapy.com

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We would like to be a valued team member in the care of your patients.

Please don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions regarding this issue.

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