

CURRENT PRACTICE TRENDS OF OEDEMA MANAGEMENT IN THE HANDS OF PEOPLE WITH TETRAPLEGIA IN AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

People who sustain tetraplegia report that their hand and arm function is the most important factor in improving their quality of life. The development of oedema in the hands can have significant implications on participation in rehabilitation and the person's level of hand function. There has been limited research specific to oedema in the hands of people with tetraplegia and there is currently no protocol or evidence to support assessment and treatment practices.

METHODS

A survey was developed to determine current practice trends of oedema management and was sent to Australian occupational therapists working in spinal cord injury (SCI) in December 2017.

RESULTS

17 participants completed the survey of which there was representation from all the states where there was a presence of the specialised spinal injury units. Identification of oedema commonly occurred by visual inspection (n=17, 100%), followed by assessment with circumferential tape measurement (n=10, 59%). Treatment commonly included elevation (n=17, 100%) with compression gloves (n=13, 76%), retrograde massage (n=13, 76%) and compression bandaging (n=12, 71%). The boxing glove method, which is unique to this population was used by more than half of the participants (n=9, 53%). Oedema in the hands was reported to lead to difficulty with exercise (n=11, 65%), along with changes body image (n=5, 29%), and pain (n=4, 24%). Four participants highlighted the lack of protocol to guide practice.

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that, with limited evidence specific to SCI, practice trends from other clinical areas that are being utilised, while also applying practices that are unique and commonly used with minimal evidence e.g. boxing glove splint. The results indicate an evidence-practice gap must be addressed.