

SPINAL CORD INJURY TO REHABILITATION TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: WHAT DOES IT TAKE

PAUL GUSTAFSON, MSC CANDIDATE

University of Saskatchewan

The concept of physical activity for people who have recently sustained spinal cord injuries is a topic that has received little discussion in the past. The purpose of the study was to describe the experience of physical activity for young adults with spinal cord injuries during the transition from rehabilitation to community involvement.

Methods

The experiences of 6 females between the ages of 15 and 24 who had sustained spinal cord injuries within the past 5 years were captured using the phenomenological methods of semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, photographs, and field notes. Rimmer's (1999) model of health promotion for people with disabilities combined with Peters (1996) model of disablement as the conceptual framework was used to facilitate the interpretation of the findings.

Results

The participants indicated that physical activity was a very important component to living a psychologically, socially and physically healthy lifestyle following a spinal cord injury. A thematic analysis revealed three themes: (a) As my body heals ..., (b) Back off ..., and (3) My life to live ... getting back to life.

Conclusion

The importance of physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle for someone who has sustained a spinal cord injury was a predominant message that came through from the participants of this study. The participants identified three different significant time periods that relate to physical activity and spinal cord injury: physical activity introduced during in hospital rehabilitation, physical activity opportunities during the transition from hospital to community, and continued physical activity pursuits once at home and established in the community. A transition gap between in hospital rehabilitation and community physical activity opportunities was also identified. A multidisciplinary partnering of healthcare professionals with fitness and physical activity experts may be an option to begin closing this gap.

References

Peters, D. J. (1996a). Disablement observed, addressed, and experienced: Integrating subjective experience into disablement models. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 18(12), 593-603.

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Speaker Bio

Paul has a Bachelors of Social Work and has worked as a Rehabilitation Counsellor for a number of years specializing in assisting people with spinal cord injuries return to their communities following rehabilitation. Paul is currently completing my Masters at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in the field of Kinesiology, as well as being a sessional instructor in the College of Kinesiology