

Facebook Support Groups and Pilon Fractures: An Analysis of Patient Injury Perceptions and Social Media

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INTRODUCTION: Social media, and its role in orthopaedic surgery, has been rapidly evolving. Pilon fractures are particularly complex with previous studies showing the significantly impact this fracture has on patient's quality of life. The use of social media has been minimally evaluated in the context of pilon fractures. The purpose of this study is to evaluate patient perceptions of their injury, and whether participation in the Facebook group altered their views of their injury or influenced their treatment course.

METHODS: Members of the Pilon Fracture Facebook group were surveyed via a public post to the Facebook group homepage from July - August 2023. An anonymous 16 question online survey was constructed using questions focused on demographics, time since injury, perception of injury, and impact that facebook group support has had in the recovery process. No incentive was provided in exchange for participation.

RESULTS: The post was made visible to 1,800 members of the Pilon Fracture Support group. Out of 182 active contributors, 155 respondents represent (85%) of group members who are active within the facebook group. Average time since injury was 2.92 years. 74% of patients were referred through Facebook. Upon diagnosis of pilon fracture, significance of injury was not explained by providers to 60% of respondents. 81% of respondents noted that being part of an online support group altered their perception of injury. The majority of respondents reported not making decisions entirely off of the group, but when a decision was made 78% was related to surgery. The majority of respondents (58%) reported seeing others further along in their recovery was both encouraging and discouraging. 87% of active participants reported posting in the group, and 80% of these posts were in regards to rehabilitation. 64% of respondents responded as extremely likely to recommend an online support group during their pilon fracture injury rehabilitation.

DISCUSSION: Pilon fractures are notoriously characterized by poor outcomes following surgical management. The utilization of an online support group can offer an outlet of community and patient educational information otherwise not offered through standard medical practice. Significant efforts should be made to better understand the global impact of pilon fractures on the patient's rehabilitation experience in addition to how support groups influence the psychosocial aspect of injury recovery.

SIGNIFICANCE/CLINICAL RELEVANCE:

Given that pilon fractures are injuries that can significantly impact a patient's quality of life and are notoriously associated with poor outcomes, evaluating patient injury perception through Facebook support groups may provide valuable insight into the barriers patients face during treatment and provide avenues to improve physician understanding of patient expectations.

Table 1: Complete List of Questions in Qualtrics Survey

Question Number
1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender identity
3. How far out are you from your original injury?
4. How was your injury originally treated?
5. How many surgeries have you had total?
6. How were you referred to the Pilon Fracture Support group?
7. Do you feel that the significance of your injury was adequately explained to you before surgery?
8 (a). Compared to your activity level prior to injury, what amount have you been able to return to your preinjury activity level? - Work
8 (b). Compared to your activity level prior to injury, what amount have you been able to return to your preinjury activity level? - Hobbies - outside work (Sports, Exercise, Gardening, Walking etc.)
9. Has being part of the facebook group altered your perception of your injury prognosis?
10. Have you made any medical decisions based off of information you received in the group?
11. If you answered yes, what medical decision was that?
12. Have you found seeing others further along in their recovery to be encouraging or discouraging?
13. Have you ever posted in the facebook group?
14. If you answered yes. Which option below best describes the contents of your facebook group post?
15. How likely are you to recommend this Facebook group to someone with a similar injury?

Table 5: Posting Topics

Posting Topics (Q14)	n	% (n=129*)
		*129 individual responses including one or more selections
Physician Recommendation	19	14.73
Further Operations	46	35.66
Postoperative Rehabilitation	104	80.62
Complication Management	45	34.88
Pain Management	45	34.88

Table 4: Medical Decisions

What Medical Decision (Q11)	n	% (n=54)
Preoperative	1	1.85
Surgery	22	40.74
Repeat Surgery	20	37.04
Postoperative Rehabilitation	3	5.56
Wound Management	8	14.81
Activity	0	0.00

