

Secondary Health Conditions following Spinal Cord Injury

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Introduction

- Secondary health conditions (SHCs) are physical or psychological health problems resulting from an underlying impairment.
- SHCs are often experienced by people with spinal cord injury (SCI)¹, and are known to negatively impact quality of life.
- Few studies have investigated SHCs prospectively in SCI populations. This is necessary to understand whether the experience of SHCs changes over time.

Objective

- To describe secondary health conditions experienced by New Zealanders with SCI over time.

Methods

- Between 2007 and 2009, 118 people with SCI were recruited during their first-ever admission to one of New Zealand's two spinal units².
- Participants provided comprehensive health and wellbeing information during interviews held 6, 18, and 30 months post-SCI.
- Questions were asked about 14 commonly reported SCI-related SHCs (response options included: not bothered, slightly bothered, moderately bothered, or greatly bothered).



References

1. Noreau L, Noonan VK, Cobb J, Leblond J, Dumont FS. Spinal cord injury community survey: a national, comprehensive study to portray the lives of Canadians with spinal cord injury. *Top Spinal Cord Inj Rehabil.* 2014;20(4): 249-264.
2. Sullivan M, Paul CE, Herbison GP, Tamou P, Derrett S, Crawford M. A longitudinal study of the life histories of people with spinal cord injury. *Inj Prev.* 2010;16(e3):1-9.

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Results

- Most participants were male (76%), most (56%) were aged < 45 years, and were of New Zealand European ethnicity (67%); 20% were Māori.
- The most commonly reported SHC was leg spasm, with 64%, 66%, and 59% of participants reporting bother at 6, 18, and 30 months respectively.
- Pressure areas, which are a frequent cause for concern in SCI patients and their caregivers, were reported by 18% of participants at 18 months and by 17% at 30 months.
- At least 85% of participants experienced 'moderate' or 'great' bother from a SHC at each time point. Furthermore, 40-60% of participants reported 'great' bother from ≥ 4 SHCs at each interview.

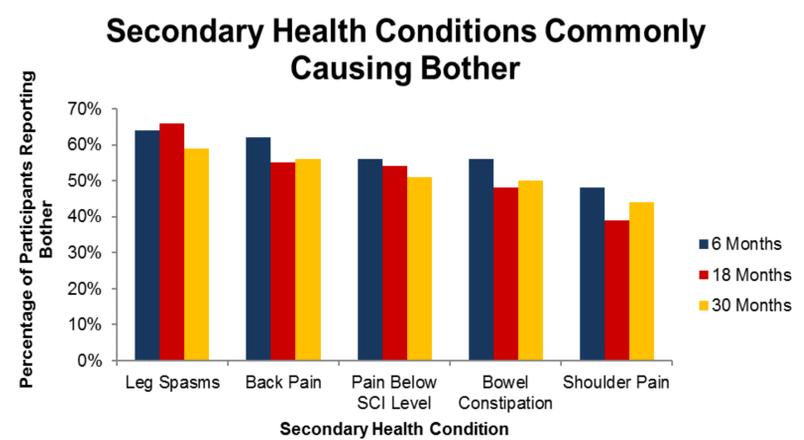


Figure 1. Secondary health conditions most commonly reported at each assessment point.

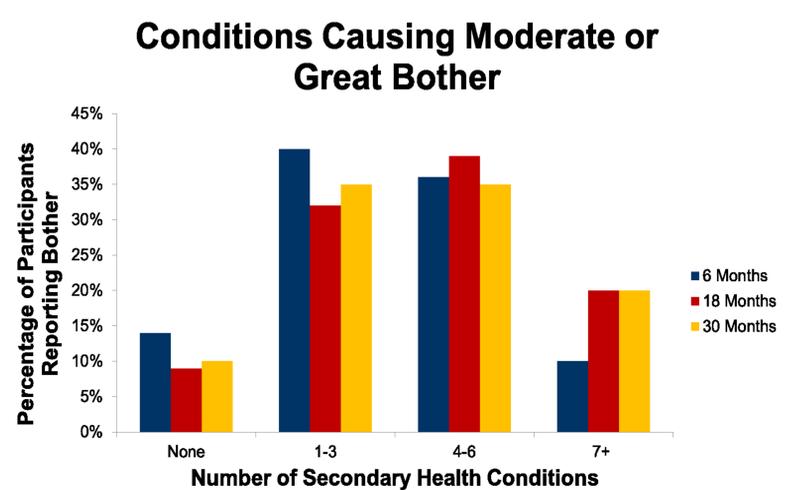


Figure 2. Number of secondary health conditions causing moderate or great bother at each assessment point.

Conclusions

- This study appears to be the first to document SHCs, over time, among New Zealanders with SCI.
- We found that SHCs are prevalent following SCI. In addition to being extremely bothersome, these conditions are likely to present high costs to the health sector.
- Further research is needed to determine the impact of SHCs on the health and wellbeing outcomes of people with SCI, and to identify factors that prevent their development.