

4-11-2011

Pain Quality Descriptors in Persons with Limb Loss

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Purpose: To describe and document pain quality descriptors in persons with limb loss.

Background:

Phantom limb pain is very common, and its pain quality descriptors give insight to the lived experience of phantom limb pain.

Significance:

This study reports unique phantom limb pain quality descriptor categories.

Research Methods:

This is a secondary analysis of an existing data set. The original instrument included open-ended interview to assess phantom limb pain quality descriptors. Data were analyzed for emerging categories of phantom limb pain descriptors.



Photo accessed 2-14-08 at <http://www.who.int/classifications/apps/icf/photocontest/Default.aspx>

Demographics:

The sample demographics were mean age 52.3 years, mean education level 14.0 years, male 71.2%, and race/ethnicities were White 67.3%, Black 23.1%, Latino 1.9%, Native American 1.9%, and mixed 3.8%.

Funded by the Jody DeMeyer Endowment

Results:

Two emerging categories were:

- * Different pain quality descriptors in different missing limbs
- * Different pain quality descriptors in different locations within the same missing limb

Exemplar:

Upper extremities: "Aching"

Lower extremities: "Sharp, vulturous pain, electricity"

Implications:

Phantom limb pain quality descriptors may vary by location within and among missing limbs. Nurses can incorporate this into pain assessment methods of research and practice.