Impact of thumb base osteoarthritis: a qualitative study of patients’ perspectives

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ABSTRACT TEXT
Introduction: Despite the high prevalence of thumb base osteoarthritis (OA), little is known about the patient perspective. This study aimed to explore the impact of thumb base OA from the perspective of people with the condition in the New Zealand context.
Methods: In this pragmatic qualitative study, semi-structured interviews and solicited diaries were conducted with 30 adults with thumb base OA. The holistic health lens of the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework was adopted. Data were thematically analysed using an inductive approach. Results were interpreted using the Health Impact Model.
Key results: Five inter-related levels of impact were identified: symptom status, functional limitations, restrictions in social activities and roles, negative thoughts and feelings, and altered sense of self. Impact at each level was influenced by personal and environmental factors. An unmet need was identified – participants desired more information about the condition and how they can help themselves.
Conclusion: Thumb base OA has a significant impact on all aspects of health. Important functional restrictions as well as other aspects of health important to patients are not captured in currently used outcome measures for thumb base OA. Patient information about the condition is lacking.
Key practice points: Clinical practice and research need to account for the mental, social and spiritual impact of thumb base OA. Additional questions specific to thumb base OA may improve the sensitivity of outcome measures. Easily-available evidence-based patient information is likely to reduce the impact of thumb base OA.

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Physiotherapist and Hand Therapist at Southern DHB, and part-time PhD candidate investigating the impact of thumb base osteoarthritis and the effectiveness of splinting.