

# Postoperative Distress of Orthopedic Ambulatory Surgery Patients



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## ABSTRACT

Patients who undergo orthopedic ambulatory surgery have reported high levels of symptom distress during recovery at home. Content analysis of this qualitative descriptive study identified techniques of symptom management that effectively reduce postoperative symptom distress after orthopedic ambulatory surgery and provided insight into facilitators and barriers to postsurgery self-management. Focus groups consisted of 19 patients and caregivers recruited from a university orthopedic surgery office. The authors identified the common themes as distressing symptoms and consequences of surgery, management of symptoms, and self-management facilitators and barriers. Participants in our study noted the lack of continuity of care after discharge and wanted to know the realities of symptoms and receive more detailed information from care providers on how to self-manage symptoms. Nurses involved in the care of these patients should focus not only on short-term recovery, but on preparing patients to manage sustained recovery issues at home. *AORN J* 105 (May 2017) 464-477. © AORN, Inc, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2017.03.005>

Key words: *orthopedic surgery, ambulatory surgery, symptom management, self-management, recovery.*

Approximately 65% of all surgeries in the United States are performed in the ambulatory setting.<sup>1,2</sup> Patients may undergo these surgeries in a hospital-related or freestanding ambulatory surgery center and return home after discharge from the facility. Although morbidity and mortality after ambulatory surgery are lower than morbidity and mortality after surgeries in inpatient facilities, ambulatory surgery patients have less efficient access to health care providers and often experience difficulties during their home recovery.<sup>3</sup> The process of recovery begins immediately after surgery and extends until the surgical patient is independent and has returned to activities of daily living.<sup>4,5</sup>

Orthopedic surgeries are the most commonly performed procedures in the ambulatory setting, second only to lens and

cataract surgeries.<sup>1</sup> Patients who undergo orthopedic ambulatory surgery have reported high levels of symptom distress during recovery at home.<sup>5-7</sup>

## SIGNIFICANCE TO NURSING

Perioperative nurses should be more fully aware of the effect of postoperative symptoms on the comfort and recovery of patients and on the ability of in-home caregivers to provide assistance and oversight that is safe and comfortable for both the patient and caregiver. The perioperative nurse is often the bridge between quality care performed at the institution and the patient's self-care at home and is responsible for facilitating a smooth recovery with positive outcomes for the patient and caregiver.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2017.03.005>

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## STUDY GOALS

The goals of this qualitative descriptive research study were to identify symptom management techniques that effectively reduce the distress of at-home orthopedic surgery recovery after ambulatory surgery and identify facilitators and barriers to the self-management of postoperative symptoms.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A 2005 study of 2,754 ambulatory surgery patients by Mattila et al<sup>8</sup> concluded that because of the frequency of postdischarge symptoms, especially in the first week after ambulatory surgery, additional research was needed to evaluate the effect of these symptoms on functional recovery and to develop interventions to lessen the burden of the symptoms.<sup>8</sup> However, patients continue to have distress at home during recovery from ambulatory surgery.<sup>3</sup>

Patients who underwent knee arthroscopy in the ambulatory surgery setting have identified altered mobility, ineffective therapeutic regimen (ie, patient was unable to follow care instructions), fatigue, drowsiness, nausea, pain, loss of appetite, anxiety, surgical incision care, and altered role performance as problems during the first 72 hours postsurgery.<sup>7,9</sup> Patients undergoing orthopedic surgery have reported more problems at 72 hours postsurgery than at any earlier time, reported significantly decreased quality of life, and required a continued need for nursing contact and support.<sup>5-7</sup>

## POSTOPERATIVE SYMPTOMS

Certain postoperative symptoms are common to patients after ambulatory surgery and must be self-managed at home.

### Pain

A high incidence of postoperative pain occurs after ambulatory surgery and is one of the most frequently cited causes of unplanned admission to the hospital after ambulatory surgery.<sup>10-13</sup> Adult patients who have undergone ambulatory surgery and are recovering at home report pain as the most frequent symptom experienced and the main reason for unplanned health care contact.<sup>11,14</sup> Despite advancements in the management of pain during the past 20 years, most patients still experience significant postsurgical pain.<sup>14</sup>

Patients have described the first 48 hours after orthopedic surgery as one of the most painful surgical experiences.<sup>9,10,15</sup> A secondary data analysis of patients who underwent orthopedic ambulatory surgery demonstrated that, on the day of surgery, 53.7% of patients experienced moderate to severe pain, with 51.2% experiencing moderate to severe pain on postoperative day 1. This percentage decreased during the first

week, but 18.6% still reported severe or moderate pain on day 7.<sup>16</sup> In other studies, patients who underwent orthopedic surgeries involving the shoulder or knee reported significantly higher mean levels of pain on a 0 (no pain) to 10 (worst pain) numeric rating scale when compared with other types of surgeries.<sup>16,17</sup> Patients commonly cite pain that is resistant to treatment as a reason for admission.<sup>11</sup> In one study, the postoperative level of pain was significantly related to the presence of nausea.<sup>3</sup>

### Nausea and Vomiting

After surgery, between 30% and 60% of ambulatory surgery patients experience postdischarge nausea or vomiting (PDNV).<sup>18-20</sup> Patients experiencing PDNV have the potential for complications and hospitalization, and the presence of PDNV can adversely affect patient satisfaction with care.<sup>20-22</sup> Patients who experience PDNV are likely to manage their symptoms using self-care strategies at home, sometimes by inappropriately discontinuing medications they believe are contributing to the problem.<sup>23</sup> In one descriptive study that monitored patients for seven days after ambulatory surgery, more than 50% of patients experienced PDNV, but only 14.1% used antiemetics to manage the symptoms.<sup>23</sup>

### Fatigue

The physiologic causes of fatigue after surgery are unclear, but may be related to sleep disturbances.<sup>24</sup> Patients have used fatigue to assess their own recovery process. Fatigue may last longer than expected or even hinder normal functional activities.<sup>25,26</sup> In some cases, patients have contacted health care providers for help with fatigue.

### Other Symptoms

Other postoperative symptoms that patients commonly report are sore throat, hoarseness, urinary retention, lip or mouth lesions, nonfacial skin lesions, wound healing problems, and headache.<sup>7,27-29</sup> Because these symptoms occur at home, many are underreported by patients and caregivers and can have a negative effect on recovery and can prevent the patient from resuming activities of daily living. The delay of returning to work for up to three months, for example, can have severe economic consequences.<sup>30</sup> The effect and time course of postdischarge symptoms require that the treatment of these complications extends well beyond discharge.<sup>31</sup>

## CAREGIVERS

Shifting care to the home environment places demands on both the patient and the patient's caregiver.<sup>32</sup> Although it is the policy of most health care facilities to recommend a

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