SEXUAL FUNCTION FOLLOWING BURN INJURIES - LITERATURE REVIEW (147)

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Introduction: Burns due to their sudden and devastating nature can have profound effects on sexual function by virtue of physical sequelae as well as alterations in body image and perceived desirability. A considerable number of patients encounter problems with intimate function in burns rehabilitation; nevertheless the topic appears to be poorly addressed in specialist centers worldwide.

Methods: We undertook an extensive English literature search using the following databases: PubMed, ISI Web of Science and CINAHL and retrieved all articles pertinent to the topic to date. We analyse all parameters known to affect the quality of sexual life post burn and formulate recommendations as to how best address sensitive intimate issues in rehabilitation.

Results: A number of parameters can impact on the quality of sexual functioning following burn injuries including: a) the patient's gender and age at the time of injury, b) the location, mechanism and TBSA of the burn as well as c) the pre-injury relationship status and coping mechanisms employed by the individual survivor. We conclude by formulating recommendations regarding 'when', 'who', and 'how' issues of sexual function are best addressed in burns rehabilitation.

Conclusion: Sexual function is an overlooked aspect of burns rehabilitation. Awareness of this important subject and specialist training for burn services staff is imperative; this will enable patient concerns to be expressed and addressed in a professional manner, hence contributing to better psychosocial outcomes for the burn survivor.