

Management of Rotator Cuff Tears in the Aging Adult

Kevern, MA: Stone Creek Health and Rehabilitation Asheville, NC

Educational Topic Presentation

Purpose: Review current literature regarding prevalence of rotator cuff tears in aging adults.

Description: The prevalence of rotator cuff tears increases with advancing age. There appears to be an age distribution effect of 10 years between individuals without tears progressing to unilateral tears. There is also another 10 year age distribution between individuals with unilateral tears versus bilateral tears. Often these tears are asymptomatic, however based on current literature 30-50% of tears will progress over time. Larger asymptomatic tears have greater likelihood of becoming symptomatic. Prognostic indicators such as shoulder abduction weakness are present in asymptomatic large to massive rotator cuff tears. Risk factors for symptomatic rotator cuff tears include age, history of trauma, male gender, dominant arm, and heavy labor. Patients with a symptomatic tear are at greater risk for contralateral rotator cuff tears. Symptomatic tears can be managed successfully with surgical or conservative measures. Often patients will have positive outcomes following surgical intervention even with failure of the rotator cuff repair which occurs in 20-94% of patients. Patients have been shown to have lower incidence of rotator cuff tears at 15 year follow-up following sub acromial decompression compared to prevalence in asymptomatic adults of the same age. Rotator cuff etiology and management are not fully understood at this time.

Summary: Rotator cuff tears are a common musculoskeletal disorder associated with pain and disability. However, the natural history of the disease is poorly defined and decisions regarding appropriate interventions are complex and multifactorial. Audience participation will be solicited in order to allow our expert membership to share the clinical prognostic indicators they use to make treatment decisions for patients with rotator cuff pathology.

Importance: Our patient population is aging, therefore the patients presenting with rotator cuff pathology will likely increase. Developing a system for appropriate management and potential prevention of rotator cuff pathology is needed. Patients with the highest prevalence of rotator cuff tears will be on Medicare with limited covered treatment sessions.