

# Patient Role Perspectives in Cardiac Postoperative Pain Assessment and Management: An Interpretive Phenomenological Study

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## Background

- Patient participation is a benchmark indicator for quality care<sup>1</sup> and associated with improved patient outcomes.<sup>2</sup>
- Despite surgical and pharmacological advances, under treatment of pain continues to be a significant problem worldwide,<sup>3</sup> particularly within cardiac surgery<sup>4</sup>
- Little is known regarding patient perception of their role in postoperative pain management. Improved understanding of this perceived role may support participation and improved patient outcomes.

## Purpose

Guided by The Theory of Balancing Analgesia and Side Effects<sup>5</sup> and the Social Transaction of Pain Assessment<sup>6</sup> we aimed to explore patients' perception of their role in postoperative pain assessment and management following cardiac surgery.

## Study Design

This qualitative study was based upon an Interpretive Phenomenology Approach.

## Sample and Setting

- Participants were selected using convenience sampling from postoperative cardiac patients referred to cardiac rehabilitation at a mid-western Canadian rehabilitation centre.
- Inclusion criteria: 18 years or older, ability to provide informed consent, speak and understand English, have undergone open cardiac surgery in the last 6 months.

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## Methods

- Ethical review panel permission from the University of Manitoba and RehFit access obtained.
- Following informed consent, data collection occurred through semi-structured telephone interviews (LW), digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Thematic analysis of interview data was completed using coding software AtlasTi (LW, DM) and confirmed by all authors. Demographic data and measures of anxiety (GAD-7), and depression (PHQ-) were gathered to describe the sample. Reflective researcher notes and member checking informed analysis and enhanced rigor and trustworthiness.

## Results

Six male patients, mean age 56-75, completed interviews, three provided additional confirmatory feedback on themes.

### Major emergent themes and subthemes:

- 1) **Attitude toward pain assessment and management**
  - Expectations "I try to exceed what is expected" (participant -0937)
  - Prior experience "it was not my first rodeo" (participant 1524)
  - Belief "Its my job to do the things I can do" (participant 1602)
- 2) **Coping**
  - Social interaction "I had a friend come over" (Participant 0929)
  - Mindfulness "you have to relax and concentrate" (participant 1602)
  - Knowing yourself "You have to be in tune with your body" (participant 0937)
- 1) **Care and communication**
  - Pain assessment "How do you feel someone else's pain" (participant 0929)
  - Pain education "I knew exactly what to expect" (participant 1226)
  - Empathetic care communication "Trust is what you develop through the interchange [with staff]" (participant 1602)

## Discussion

Findings of the study reinforce that prior experience and expectations influence a patients' approach to their role in pain assessment and management. Care interactions such as pain assessment and education assist patients in developing a positive attitude which contributes to improved coping with pain. These aspects of the patient's perception of pain assessment and management interact in an iterative cycle which impacts the patient perception of their role.

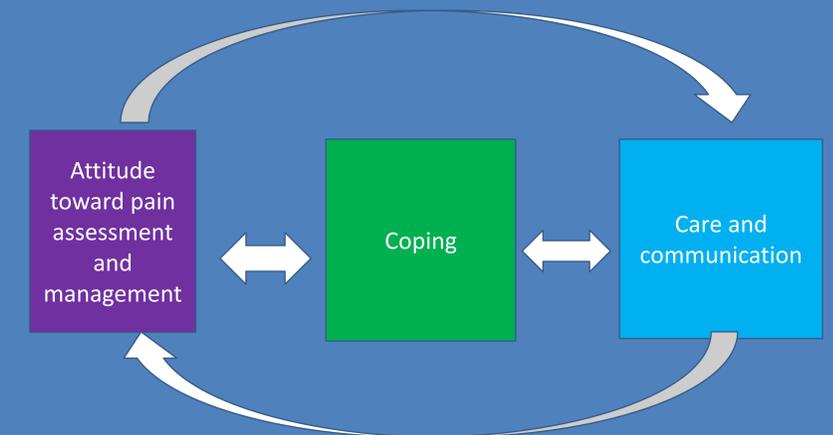


Figure: Attitude toward pain, coping and care and communication model

## Significance

- Estimates for the cost of undertreated pain in Canada alone, are in the billions<sup>7</sup>
- New approaches in pain management are needed to improve outcomes.
- Study findings offer a beginning exploration of the patient's perspective regarding participation in pain assessment and management and may assist in the development of more effective approaches to pain assessment and goal setting.

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