



Support groups for amputees: participation and virtual technology influence on the willingness for enrollment.

Abstract

The acquisition of updated and relevant information about prosthetics and overall health is a lifelong commitment for amputees. All over the world, peer support groups have proven their efficacy in helping amputees to navigate life. The participants acquire and share vital information via these gatherings. The Amputee Coalition plays a significant role in moral support of victims of limb loss. Traditionally, these groups operated in face-to-face settings, but in recent years, technology has enabled them to exploit virtual worlds and associated benefits. The objective of the study was to investigate the reasons that drive amputees to join support groups. Additionally, the study sought to establish if technology could potentially heighten access to support groups among amputees. The specific questions that the study addressed were: (1) why amputees join support groups; (2) why amputees do not participate in support groups; (3) why amputees re-join support groups; and (4) if there is a possibility for technology to improve amputee support-group engagement. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine a sample of amputees with an online presence. Data collection and management were done using REDCap electronic data capturing tool, a secure web-based application designed to facilitate the process of sample gathering. A 38-item survey divided into four sections, namely, demographics, limb loss history, amputee support group participation, and technology usage was administered to participants within the period starting from April and ending in September 2018. Descriptive and qualitative-descriptive analyses were used to scrutinize and interpret the data. Out of the 59 amputees who were enrolled in the study, 54 completed the survey. About 83 percent of the participants attended at least one support group. The majority of the participants were male. The reasons for participating in support groups were diverse. Similarly, some participants listed various reasons why they were not part of amputee support groups. In course of the research, it was discovered that technology bears the potential to play a significant role in improving amputees' access to support groups. This implies that the needs of amputee support group participants keep changing. Therefore, the participants should take part in generating the agenda for their meetings. Finally, technology should help in catering to the needs of participants.