What are adolescents’ anticipated and actual experiences of living with an Ilizarov frame?

CONCLUSIONS
The main themes identified by adolescents before application of an Ilizarov frame were anticipation of an all-encompassing impact, coping strategies including self-resignation, and certain treatment expectations. Postoperatively, they indicated that the frame was not as unmanageable or painful as expected.

Commentary
The study by Martin et al. highlights important considerations for nurses working with adolescents undergoing complex medical treatments. Practical implications for preoperative and postoperative care as well as home care are identified.

Preoperatively, nurses can conduct thorough psychosocial assessments to identify adolescents’ desired outcomes of treatment, coping styles, and thoughts or concerns about how the proposed treatment might affect their daily lives. Although standardised psychometric measures may provide a consistent approach to assessing and understanding the effects of certain concepts such as body image, an interview is recommended because it provides opportunities for adolescents to reframe their expectations. Nurses might consider using former patient testimonials, story boards, or video clips to describe the general response and recovery experiences of other teens to engage patients in a dialogue about the potential effects of treatment on their lives.

Adolescents found the first postoperative month to be the most difficult time because of their dependence on others. Nurses can assist adolescents to cope by physically caring for them while respecting their need for independence and privacy. Structured telephone or internet interviews after discharge home can be used to monitor patients’ transition and adaptation from the hospital environment. Nurses may also design creative mentoring, buddy, or peer networks to connect patients to others who have had similar experiences.

The findings are congruent with the “norms” of adolescence in which peer relationships and social networks are of critical importance. Adolescents undergoing complex and intensive treatments may feel similar to the teens in this study in that the medical care they require puts their “lives on hold.” Anticipatory guidance and exploratory dialogue with teens and their parents to acknowledge these issues and to strategise how to best maintain social networks are important.

Use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches was beneficial in this study because the researchers were able to consider answers to their research question from different perspectives that were complementary to one another yet highlighted different interpretations of the data. The convergence of multiple data sources moves toward a more full and accurate representation of the teens’ reality.

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