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Letter to the editor

Potential clinical benefits of wide-awake hand surgery from the therapist's perspective

Bénéfices cliniques potentiels de la chirurgie de la main sur patient éveillé: le point de vue du kinésithérapeute

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Wide-awake hand surgery – which is also called wide-awake local anesthesia no tourniquet (WALANT) – has recently gained popularity for its benefits to patients, health professionals and the healthcare system. While improvements in post-operative pain levels and the rupture rate after tendon repairs have been proven so far, the evidence for the benefits of WALANT surgery from the hand therapy perspective is still lacking [1,2]. Many publications suggest that post-operative treatment after WALANT hand surgery should be more effective [3,4]. In particular, the patient's compliance with therapy and early active motion are said to be the most important factors affecting the clinical results. In this short paper, we would like to add our clinical observations to the above-mentioned theoretical benefits.

Firstly, we hypothesize that the patients will return to daily life faster as they will have less fear of (re)injury. As some studies have shown, a significant portion of hand-injured patients avoid doing certain movements due to fear of pain and/or reinjury [6]. Observing the active movement during the surgery and good communication with the medical team will make the patient more confident about using his hand in daily activities when allowed by the therapist. The second potential benefit of WALANT hand surgery targets patients that will need to relearn a "new" movement after reconstructive surgery like a tendon transfer. In these populations, watching the "new" movement during the surgery will allow the neuroplastic learning process to occur more rapidly. Neuroimaging studies have shown that observing a movement accelerates the learning process by activating the same cortical regions as in real motor performance [7]. In comparison to sleep or sedation in other anesthetic techniques, wide-awake hand surgery allows the patient to be aware of what exactly happened. This advantage of WALANT is expected to affect the future of hand therapy outcomes. These two theoretical hand therapy benefits need to be tested with prospective studies.

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Disclosure of interest

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