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Nursing aspects of phantom limb pain following amputation.

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Abstract

Phantoms (painless and painful) occur following the removal of virtually all body parts. Phantoms of the limbs, including phantom limb pain (PLP), are the most studied. As yet there is no agreed theory to explain phantom limb pain but the neuromatrix and cortical reorganization theories have come to prominence over recent years. Multiple treatment strategies have been applied to PLP; however, none of these strategies have been proven to be effective for the majority of amputees. As a result of knowledge acquired through the cortical reorganization theory, new avenues for treatment have opened up. These include pre-emption and normalization strategies which have significant nursing aspects. This article explores all of these issues and identifies the implications that they have for the nursing treatment of patients with PLP and those that are expected to develop it. This involves the care of people pre-, peri- and post-amputation. All aspects of phantoms and phantom pain need to be taken into account by nurses and other healthcare workers when planning rehabilitation packages for this group.