

Examining Clinical Outcome Measures



In this age of evidence-based medicine, the purpose of original research is to, through rigorous scientific protocols, allow us to make the decision on the best practices we can employ for our patients. The outcomes of that research are often graded using various measures, the most familiar to most casual

readers being the visual analog scale. However, there are dozens of others that can also be used.

In this issue of the *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association* (JAPMA), Andrew J. Meyr, DPM, the most recent addition to our Editorial Advisory Board, and his team report on their 5-year review of clinical outcomes published in both JAPMA and *The Journal of Foot and Ankle Surgery* (JFAS). (See page 176.) He and his team reviewed original research articles in both publications to determine which outcome measures were being used in our literature. Their findings were surprisingly consistent with similar research published in the *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* that looked at the orthopedic foot and ankle surgical literature. In that article, the authors concluded that the wide range of outcome measures being used may be detrimental to the principles of evidence-based medicine, and they suggest that an effort should be made to use only a small number of validated and clinically useful scales.

Dr. Meyr's article is unique and important for a few reasons. It is the first study in our professional literature to examine the issue of clinical outcome

measures and to show the great variability that is present in our published literature. As Editor of JAPMA, I agree with the conclusion that we need to make an effort to be more cognizant of the measures being used by authors in submitted manuscripts and to begin accepting only those that have been demonstrated to be reliable, validated, and clinically applicable. Furthermore, this information is important enough to be jointly and simultaneously published in both JAPMA and JFAS: A first. The Editor of JFAS, D. Scot Malay, DPM, and I felt that this deserved to be published in both of our profession's major journals to reach the widest possible audience.

Another point I found interesting in this paper was that jointly the two journals published 1,336 articles, of which 655, or 49%, were determined to be original research. Although the authors did not breakdown the number of original research papers per journal, just the fact that one-half of combined articles published in our profession's scientific/clinical journals constituted research with the potential to produce new information that can be used to create better outcomes for our patients, was heartening.

For too long the podiatric literature has been minimized by detractors as containing nothing more than case reports of low scientific impact. If you, the reader, has not been closely following the literature, I invite you to go back over the past year or two and examine the tables of contents of JAPMA; it's right on the front cover. You might be surprised at what you find in terms of the quality and originality of the content.

WARREN S. JOSEPH, DPM
Editor, JAPMA
wsjoseph@apma.org