ABSTRACT

Background: When deciding medical treatment, patients’ perspectives are important. There is limited knowledge about patients’ views when choosing non-operative treatment or anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction (ACLR) after ACL injury.

Purpose: To describe reasons that influenced patients’ decisions for non-operative treatment or ACLR after ACL injury.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Methods: This study recruited a total of 223 patients (50% men), aged 28 ± 8 years who had sustained ACL injury, either unilateral or bilateral. Subjects were, at different time points after injury, asked to fill out a questionnaire about their choice of treatment, where an ACLR treatment decision was made, some responded before and some after the ACLR treatment. A rating of the strength of 10 predetermined reasons in their choice of treatment graded as 0 (no reason) to 3 (very strong reason), was done.

Results: Patients with unilateral ACL injury treated with ACLR (110 patients) rated “inability to perform physical activity at the same level as before the injury due to impaired knee function” (96%), “fear of increased symptoms during activity” (87%) and “giving way episodes” (83%) as strong or very strong reasons in their treatment decision. Patients with bilateral ACL injury treated with ACLR (109 knees) rated similar reasons as patients with unilateral ACLR and also “low confidence in the ability to perform at the preinjury activity level without ACLR” (80%) as strong or very strong reasons. Patients with unilateral ACL injury treated non-operatively (46 patients) rated “advice from clinician” (69%) as a strong or very strong reason. Patients with bilateral ACL injury treated non-operatively (25 knees) rated “absence of giving way episodes” (62%), and “no feeling of instability” (62%) as strong or very strong reasons.

Conclusion: Inability to perform physical activity, fear of increased symptoms, and giving way episodes were reasons that patients with ACL injury considered when making decisions about ACLR. When choosing non-operative treatment, patients considered the absence of instability or giving way symptoms, being able to perform physical activity, and advice from clinicians.

Level of evidence: 4

Keywords: ACL, ACL reconstruction, treatment decision