

Volume 6, No. 1 (Supplement)

June 2011

ISSN 1823-2140

The National University  
with an INTERNATIONAL REACH



UNIVERSITI  
KEBANGSAAN  
MALAYSIA  
National University of Malaysia

# MEDICINE & Health

The Official Journal of The Faculty of Medicine UKM

## 7<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Indonesia Brunei Medical Sciences Conference "TOWARDS A HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATIVE APPROACH IN HEALTHCARE"



22<sup>nd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011

Equatorial Hotel, Bangi, Selangor,  
MALAYSIA

officiated by

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## THE QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG SPINAL CORD INJURED POPULATION: DOES IT IMPROVE WITH TIME?

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### **Background:**

Today, the spinal cord injured (SCI) population can live as long as the normal population can. However survival prediction is a curse if health, or more importantly the state of mind is severely compromised. This study aimed to evaluate if quality of life (QoL) among SCI population improves with time and if it is related to age or the level of injury.

### **Materials and Methods:**

Sixty four respondents from Klang Valley (Malay 28.1%, Chinese 53.1%, and Indian 17.2%, and others 1.6%) participated in this cross-sectional study from December 2010 to May 2011. Assessment tools used were a proforma for basic data, the World Health Organization Quality of Life Measure Abbreviated version (WHOQOL-BREF) and the Standard Neurological Classification of Spinal Cord Injury charts by the American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA). This study further divided the injury level into complete paraplegia (CP), incomplete paraplegia (IP), complete quadriplegia (CQ) and incomplete quadriplegia (IQ).

### **Results:**

This study showed that the QoL had significant relationship with post-injury duration ( $p < 0.05$ ). Respondents with longer post-injury duration were doing better than those recently injured. However, QoL was not significantly affected by age difference or injury level ( $p > 0.05$ ). Quadriplegias fared worse in the beginning but caught up with the paraplegias later on. Other factors that positively influenced the QoL were female gender, being employed, monthly income of more than RM500.00, and participation in sexual activity after injury ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### **Conclusion:**

This study concluded that QoL among SCI population does improve with time. This is possibly due to sample being taken from urban settings where healthcare and peer support group is accessible and available. This study also strongly recommends that the monthly disabled stipend be increased at least to RM500.00 per month instead of the current RM300.00.

### **Keywords:**

spinal cord injuries, quality of life, Malaysia, aging