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Comparison of Visual Analog Pain Score Reported to Physician vs Nurse in Nonoperatively Treated Foot and Ankle Patients

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Background: Patient reported outcome measures (PROMs) are taking a more prominent role in Orthopedics as health care seeks to define treatment outcomes. The Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) is considered a reliable measure of acute pain. A previous study found that operative candidates' VAS pain score was significantly higher when reported to the surgeon compared to the nurse. This study's aim is to examine whether this phenomenon occurs in nonoperative patients. We hypothesize that patients' VAS scores reported to the surgeon and a nurse will be the same

Methods: This study is a retrospective cohort of 201 consecutive nonoperative patients treated by a single surgeon. Patients were asked to rate pain intensity by a nurse followed by the surgeon using a horizontal VAS, 0 "no pain" to 10 "worst pain". Differences in reported pain levels were compared with data from the previous cohort of 201 consecutive operative patients.

Results: The mean VAS score reported to the nurse was 3.2 whereas the mean VAS score reported to the surgeon was 4.2 ($p<.001$). The mean difference in VAS scores reported for operative patients was 2.9, whereas the mean difference for nonoperative patients was 1.0 ($p < .001$).

Conclusion: This study found statistically significant differences between VAS scores reported to the surgeon versus the nurse in nonoperative patients which support the trend found in our previous study, where operative patients reported significantly higher scores to the surgeon. The mean difference between reported pain scores is significantly higher for operative patients compared to nonoperative patients.