

# Quality of life and treatment satisfaction in patients with hypothyroidism

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## Background

- Hypothyroidism is a life-long chronic disease that slows the metabolism, with both physiological symptoms (e.g. cold intolerance) and psychological symptoms (e.g. depression, and problems with cognitive functioning)<sup>1</sup>. The disorder is particularly prevalent in women and the elderly<sup>1</sup>.
- Measures of satisfaction with treatment and the impact of the condition on quality of life (QoL), similar to the DTSQ<sup>\*\*2</sup> and ADDQoL<sup>\*\*\*3</sup> for diabetes, were needed for future research and in the clinical management of hypothyroidism.

\*Diabetes Treatment Satisfaction Questionnaire

\*\*Audit of Diabetes-Dependent Quality of Life

## Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 patients with hypothyroidism:

- 30 women and 8 men, 37 treated with thyroxine,
- mean age 51.9 (range 29-79) years,
- three centres: Gateshead, London and Surrey.

- The prime purpose of the interviews was to determine item selection for two new condition-specific questionnaires measuring QoL and treatment satisfaction, the ThyDQoL and ThyTSQ respectively<sup>4</sup>.

- Open questions concerned:

- (1) the effects of underactive thyroid and its treatment on QoL, with interviewees being asked to imagine life without the disorder (to elicit domains impacted by hypothyroidism),
- (2) satisfaction with treatment.

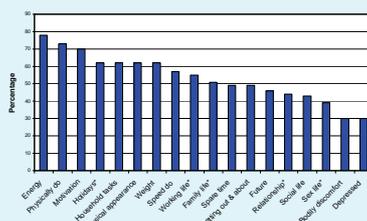
- Interviewees "thought aloud" whilst completing draft questionnaires. Interview data were analysed for content.

## Findings

### Quality of life

Patients described the negative impact of underactive thyroid, both before and after thyroxine treatment, on several aspects of life, (Fig. 1). All 18 domains in the figure are included in the new ThyDQoL questionnaire.

Fig 1: Reports of negative impact of hypothyroidism on domain (%).  
(\*excludes those respondents who indicated the domain was not applicable)



*"Before diagnosis, I was constantly asleep. I was freezing cold. I had no energy. My skin was like leather. My hair was really brittle.... I felt really ill, but I couldn't explain how I felt, and I thought people would think I was a hypochondriac.... Then it was diagnosed, and I felt good, because I thought, 'I've actually got something wrong with me', which was a relief!"*

(a woman aged 38 yrs)

### Treatment satisfaction

#### (1) Present satisfaction

- All but one patient reported improvements in some symptoms after commencing thyroxine treatment. However, several patients (24%) were dissatisfied about receiving sub-optimal thyroxine replacement that did not relieve lingering symptoms.
- Seven ThyTSQ-Present items were designed to measure: satisfaction with current treatment, the degree to which treatment is working and controlling symptoms, understanding of the condition, convenience of treatment, and whether the patient would encourage others to have the treatment, and how satisfied they are to continue with their present treatment.

#### (2) Around the time of diagnosis

- Interviewees reported:
  - concerns that the doctor had not taken the condition or the patient seriously (32% of interviewees),
  - difficulty and delay in receiving a diagnosis of hypothyroidism and/or prescription of thyroxine treatment to alleviate symptoms (27%),
  - dissatisfaction with lack of information provided by healthcare professionals about (a) the condition (32%) and (b) the treatment (32%).
- The 4-item ThyTSQ-Past was designed to cover past satisfaction with these four aspects of treatment.

## Discussion

Multiple aversive symptoms of hypothyroidism remain, despite thyroxine treatment, causing considerable dissatisfaction and marked impairment of QoL in many patients. Results suggest the need for improved provision of information about both condition and treatment.

Condition-specific measures of QoL (the ThyDQoL) and treatment satisfaction (ThyTSQ) have now been developed for use in evaluating and improving treatment for people with hypothyroidism. They are now ready for use in research and clinical practice.

## References

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## Access to questionnaires

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