

Original article published in the Bündner Woche, December 18, 2024, p. 51

Research in the region

Rehabilitation after hip fractures

Partial weight bearing has no advantage



A patient with a recommendation for partial weight-bearing after hip surgery exercises under medical supervision. Image: Kliniken Valens

There are more and more older people in Switzerland. This is due to the fact that life expectancy is increasing and fewer children are being born. This demographic change is reflected in the healthcare system: the number of hospital stays due to hip fractures has risen significantly in recent years. While there were 9019 cases in 2005, there were already 13819 cases in 2023 - an increase of over 50 percent.

It is particularly important for older patients to get back on their feet quickly after a hip surgery, as otherwise the risk of bedriddenness increases. For this reason, rehabilitation usually begins just a few days after the surgery. At 10 inpatient and various outpatient locations in the cantons of St. Gallen, Graubünden, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Zurich, the Kliniken Valens offer comprehensive rehabilitation services, including treatment for musculoskeletal conditions such as hip fractures. In addition to providing treatment, the Kliniken Valens conduct their own research in order to continuously improve their therapies.

Nikolaus Kramm has been working as an assistant doctor at various locations of Kliniken Valens since 2022. He noticed during his work that some patients were referred with the recommendation of partial weight-bearing after surgical treatment of hip fractures, although the current medical guidelines recommend partial weight-bearing for uncomplicated cases and older patients.

“We are not disregarding the recommendations of the referring doctors, but we wanted to investigate whether partial weight-bearing actually has advantages for rehabilitation,” explains Kramm.

When patients are admitted, the recommendation for partial or full weight-bearing is recorded in addition to the diagnosis. In addition, mobility and independence tests are carried out on arrival and departure. Kramm was therefore able to access suitable anonymized patient data from the Valens clinics for his study. The comparison of this data showed that there were no differences between the two patient groups - those who completed rehabilitation with a partial load and those who completed it with a full load - in terms of either mobility or independence.

“The results of our study suggest that partial weight-bearing has no advantage,” explains Kramm. It is also questionable whether the desired partial weight-bearing is adhered to at all, even if it has been recommended and trained. The doctor explains: “The only reason why older patients don't use full weight-bearing is pain. If this is not present - even thanks to modern minimally invasive surgical techniques - they put full weight on the leg.”

Kramm's study results, which will soon be published in a medical journal, could help to rethink the practice of partial weight-bearing after hip fractures. Kramm hopes that his findings will lead to faster and more effective rehabilitation and that patients will become mobile again more quickly after hip surgery.

Nikolaus Kramm und Daniela Heinen



Nikolaus Kramm, Photo: Kliniken Valens

Kliniken Valens

The Kliniken Valens specialize in the rehabilitation of patients with functional disorders of the musculoskeletal and nervous system, cardiovascular diseases, internal oncological, pneumological, psychological and psychosomatic illnesses. www.kliniken-valens.ch

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