

Exploration of Bullying Incidents in Adolescents and Emerging Adults (AEA) with Spina Bifida (SB) enrolled in the HCT Program of the CHLA SB Clinic

Rebecca Heymann, MA, OTR/L

Description/abstract: Previous research indicates that individuals with disabilities may be at increased risk for bullying. The purpose of this retrospective pilot study was to better understand the bullying experiences of adolescents and emerging adults participating in the Movin' On Up Health Care Transition (HCT) Program at the Spina Bifida Clinic at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Data extracted from the clinical records of 154 patients ages 10 to 20 included descriptions of incidences of bullying; the responses of school personnel, families, and patients to bullying; and the intervention responses of the clinical team when bullying was reported. Those individuals who had experienced bullying reported specific incidences related to self-care and mobility differences. Responses to bullying included home schooling, changing schools, teachers or principals intervening by speaking with bullies, or no response. Notably, less than 10% of participants reported bullying that was transcribed in the medical record. This is much lower than the expected incidence rate of bullying among middle and high school students. Based on insight gathered through the detailed descriptions of this pilot study, it is clear that direct interviews with this population could elicit further information to support best practice.