Surgery versus conservative management of stable thoracolumbar fracture: the PRESTO feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

The PRESTO feasibility RCT

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Plain English summary

Fractures occurring in the mid- to low back region (or thoracolumbar fractures) are the most common back fractures. When the fracture is stable with no spinal nerve injury, there is uncertainty whether treatment with surgery or non-surgical treatment (e.g. stabilising the spine with a brace) results in the best outcome for patients.

The Pragmatic Randomised Evaluation of Stable Thoracolumbar fracture treatment Outcomes (PRESTO) study aimed to explore whether or not it would be feasible to carry out a full-scale study to find out which of these two treatments works best.

Adults aged ≥ 16 years being treated for these fractures in three hospitals were invited to take part in the study. Over the course of 1 year, we assessed how many patients were treated, the number who met the study entry criteria and the proportion of eligible patients who agreed to take part.

Staff and patients were interviewed about the study processes and their experiences of taking part.

Spine surgeons from around the UK were also asked to complete an online survey, which asked questions about the treatment of patients with this fracture.

There were fewer patients than expected who met the study entry criteria and, of these, fewer patients who agreed to take part. There were differences among surgeons about the definition of a stable fracture, and we found that surgeons have strong views about whether or not surgery is appropriate when fractures are stable.

We also found that more support would be required for the staff involved in inviting patients to take part in a bigger study, and that the format and content of information provided to patients needs to be improved.

The findings of the PRESTO study showed that a large trial is unlikely to be successful at this time; however, we have provided important information for future research into the treatment of these fractures.

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This report

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