in this study (primary vs secondary RP) and adopting poorly constructed new (thumb) DDD test made it difficult to discriminate the degree of change when the test result is unidirectional (normal thumb DDD).

A three-arm trial including an active control as well as a normal-control group can readily assess whether a failure to distinguish the test group from normal controls implies sparing was due to non-involvement by the pathological process or is simply the result of a trial test that lacked the ability to discriminate between a lower degree of involvement.

The comparison of normal with RP groups in such a trial provides evidence of test sensitivity. It is possible to make the active groups larger than the normal group in order to improve the precision of the test comparison, if this is considered important.

I find it difficult to accept the conclusion statement that the thumbs are spared based on the test method adopted in this study.

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Comment on: Sparing of the thumb in Raynau’d’s phenomenon: reply

We thank Dr Binymin for his interest in our article [1]. We fully agree that although useful in the assessment of patients with RP, thermography has its limitations and we too have reported that there are concerns about reproducibility [2]. However, we believe that Dr Binymin’s concern [3] about not including healthy controls in our cross-sectional study examining thumb involvement in patients with RP is unfounded: the reason for not including a control group was because the comparison was ‘within-subject’. Including healthy controls, who do not experience RP and who do not demonstrate temperature gradients along their fingers, would not have been meaningful.

Digit length or width may well be the explanation for the apparent thumb sparing as discussed, and adjustment for this would be inappropriate. We used both objective (thermography) and subjective (symptom reporting by patients) measures to assess thumb sparing in patients with RP. Thumb sparing found using thermography was confirmed by symptoms reported by patients.

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