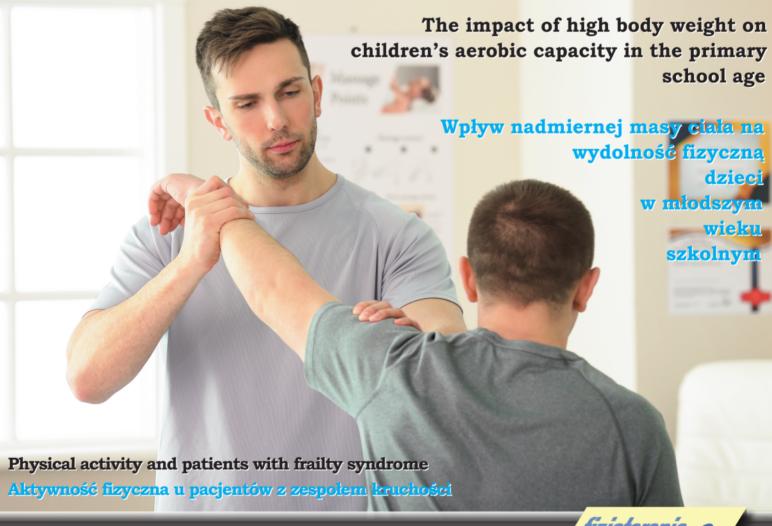
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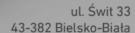
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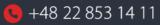
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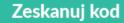
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Effect of neurodevelopmental treatment on hospitalization and growth of premature infants in neonatal intensive care unit

Wpływ terapii neurorozwojowej na hospitalizację i wzrost wcześniaków na oddziale intensywnej terapii noworodkowej

Maha Khairy M. El-Shaarawy^{1(A,B,C,D,E,F)}, Manal S. Abd El-Wahab^{2(A,C,D,E,F)}, Samia A. Abdel Rahman^{2(A,C,D,E,F)}. Mohammed Fakher H. Ali^{1(C,E,F)}

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Abstract

Background. Quality of life and standard of health care in a society is measured by preterm infants' mortality rate. Alternative treatment may be effective in increasing survival rate of preterm infants. In premature infants, weight gain becomes the main criterion for hospital discharge. Neurodevelopmental treatment (NDT) can be safely ap-plied to premature infants who are in various physiological states and may enhance their weight. Purpose. This study aimed to investigate the effect of NDT on the duration of hospital stay and growth of premature infants at the Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU). Methods. This convenient quasiexperimental study was conducted from September 2019 to November 2020 in NICU of Damanhur Teaching Hospital, Egypt. A total of 108 premature infants between 32 to 37 weeks gestational age with birth weight between 1150 to 3900 grams participated in this study. They were assigned into control and study groups. Weight, length and head circumference were measured as an indicators for growth for both groups before, after one week of intervention and at discharge. Both groups received their medical treatment in addition to conventional chest physical therapy program. An additional NDT was applied for the study group. Results. There is a significant increase of weight in both groups with a significant difference between groups only after one week of intervention in favor for the study group. There is a significance increase of length only in the study group with no significance differences between groups. However, there is no significance change in head circumference either between groups or among the measurement periods for each group. Results also revealed a significant decrease in hospitalization in NICU for the study group when compared with that of control group. Conclusion. It could be concluded that NDT could improve growth and minimize hospitalization of preterm infants in the NICU.

Key words:

neurodevelopmental treatment, hospitalization, growth, premature infants, neonatal intensive care unit

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie. Jakość życia i standard opieki zdrowotnej w społeczeństwie mierzy się śmiertelnością wcześniaków. Alternatywne leczenie może być skuteczne w zwiększaniu przeżywalności wcześniaków. U wcześniaków przyrost masy ciała staje się głównym kryterium wypisu ze szpitala. Terapia neurorozwojowa (NDT) może być bezpiecznie stosowana u wcześniaków w różnych stanach fizjologicznych. Cel. Niniejsze badanie miało na celu zbadanie wpływu terapii NDT na czas pobytu w szpitalu i wzrost wcześniaków na Oddziale Intensywnej Opieki Noworodkowej (NICU). Metody. To wygodne quasi-eksperymentalne badanie prowadzono od września 2019 r. do listopada 2020 r. na OIOM-ie w Damanhur Teaching Hospital w Egipcie. W badaniu wzięło udział 108 wcześniaków w wieku od 32 do 37 tygodni z masą urodzeniową od 1150 do 3900 gramów. Wcześniaki zostały przydzielone do grup kontrolnych i badawczych. Waga, długość i obwód głowy zostały zmierzone jako wskaźniki wzrostu dla obu grup przed, po tygodniu interwencji i przy wypisie. Obie grupy oprócz konwencjonalnego programu fizjoterapii klatki piersiowej były poddawane leczeniu. W grupie badanej zastosowano dodatkowo terapię NDT. Wyniki. W obu grupach obserwuje się znaczny wzrost masy ciała z istotną różnicą między grupami dopiero po tygodniu interwencji na korzyść grupy badanej. Istotny wzrost długości występuje tylko w grupie badanej, bez istotnych różnic między grupami. Nie zaobserwowano istotnej zmiany w obwodzie głowy ani między grupami, ani między okresami pomiarowymi dla każdej grupy. Wyniki wykazały również istotny spadek liczby hospitalizacji na OIOM-ie w grupie badanej w porównaniu z grupą kontrolną. Wniosek. Można wywnioskować, że terapia NDT może poprawić wzrost i zminimalizować hospitalizację wcześniaków na OIOM-ie.

Słowa kluczowe

terapia neurorozwojowa, hospitalizacja, wzrost, wcześniaki, oddział intensywnej terapii noworodków



Introduction

A newborn is considered as premature if he/she is less than 37 weeks gestation, a full term infant, if he/she is between 37 to 42 weeks gestation or post term if he/she is more than 42 weeks of gestation [1]. Preterm birth is further subdivided on the basis of gestational age (GA) as extremely preterm birth (less than 28 weeks), very preterm birth (28 to less than 32 weeks) and moderate or late preterm (32 to less than 37 weeks) [2]. Because of advances in treatment modalities in newborn medicine, the survival rate of premature infants has steadily increased however the premature infants have a high chance of neurodevelopmental delay as compared to the full term infants [3].

Infants born premature are at an increased risk of neurodevelopmental delay between one and 18 years of life when compared to those born at term. The delay is most evident in the cognitive domain of neurodevelopment. However, they are also at a risk of delayed language development, motor development, and lower academic performance [4].

Moderate-to-late preterm infants (born at 32 to 36 weeks' gestation) show greater developmental delay than the general infant population. Considering that early intervention is important for good long term outcomes [5].

Growth refers to the process of quantitative increase of the body and generally means an increase in body weight, height, and head circumference (HC)[6]. Children with good growth generally show good neurodevelopmental outcomes, while those with poor growth show increased risk of delayed neural development [7]. Postnatal growth in length, weight, and HC is associated with later neurodevelopmental outcome in preterm infants [8, 9].

Premature babies are often cared for in a fashion that minimizes physical activity in order to reduce stress and stress-related complications. However, lack of physical activity might lead to poor bone development and growth as seen in bedridden children and adults. It is believed that physical activity programs (moving and pressing all joints of all limbs for several minutes a day) may promote bone development and growth in premature babies i.e: Systematic physical activity programs consisting of extension and flexion, range-of-motion exercises of both upper and lower limbs, administered for several minutes at a time several times a week for at least two weeks, with or without massage and/or tactile stimulation [10].

Neurodevelopmental therapy (NDT) including positioning, stimulation, handling, and nonnutritive sucking is recommended for premature infants [11]. It is one of the intervention methods used in physical therapy, and is applied to help patients with injuries of the central nervous system to control normal postures and promote proper development. It geinputs, various sensory such as proprioceptive, vestibular, visual, and auditory sensations. In addition, it is not a strictly defined and uniformized intervention method, but the intensity and amount of NDT can be adjusted by selecting and fusing several sensory stimuli according to the individual's health condition. Therefore, it can be safely applied to premature infants who are in various physiological states [12].

Brain development depends on complex interactions between genes and environmental experiences, and the early sensory information and motor experiences can affect formation of the brain [13]. In NICU, physical therapists could help premature infants grow by enhancing their postural control, which is necessary for digestion, feeding, and breathing, and by maintaining the range of motion, shaping the skull, and improving movement control, dietary performance, adaptation to the environment, and behavioral stability [14].

In many countries, physical therapists are involved in prenatal interventions in the NICU as specialists to prevent developmental delays and promote normal development [15]. However, in Egypt, physical therapists still have only limited access to NICU, and their role as specialists in this area has not been established due to the lack of awareness of physical therapy to promote growth and development in premature infants. Therefore; this study was designed to investigate the effect of NDT on the duration of hospital stay and growth of premature infants in NICU in order to provide grounds for the role of physical therapists as specialists in NICU.

Materials and methods

Subjects

Study design and sampling method:

This is a convenient quasi-experimental study that was conducted during the period from September 2019 to November 2020.

Sample size calculation

Sample size calculation was performed prior to the study using G*POWER statistical software) F tests- ANOVA: Fixed effects, special, main effects and interaction) to study the effect of treatment with two levels (conventional physical therapy versus NDT with conventional physical therapy) and revealed that the required sample size was 100 subjects. Calculation was made using $\alpha=0.05,\,\beta=0.2,$ effect size = 0.28. The number was increased to 110 for possible dropout.

Participants and venue

A total of 116 incubated premature infants participated in this study. They were selected from the NICU of Damanhur Teaching Hospital, Damanhur, Egypt. They were assigned to either a study or control group. They were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: gestational age between 32 to 37 weeks measured by New Ballard Score [16], birth weight between 1150 to 3900 grams, the interventricular hemorrhage level is grade II or below, on assisted ventilation (invasive and non-invasive), their vital signs are stable as reported by the neonatologist and are either in parenteral nutrition or enteral nutrition. Infants were excluded if they have one or more of the following conditions: congenital anomalies or chromosomal abnormalities and inborn errors of metabolism, musculoskeletal disorders, micro encephalopathy, congenital heart disease, any recent surgery, neonatal seizures, severe pulmonary dysplasia, interventricular hemorrhage grade III or IV and periventricular leukomalacia. Due to death, only 108 preterm infants completed the study (56 infants in the study group and 52 infants in the control group).



Materials and Procedures

Ethical considerations

The study protocol was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Physical Therapy, Cairo University (No:P.T.REC/012/002916). Approval from the director of NICU of Damanhur Teaching Hospital was obtained. The consent forms were distributed to the parents or guardians after an explanation of the procedures in detail. A signed consent form was obtained before starting the study.

Assessment of general condition and physiological parameters of each infant was performed daily and the same general nursing routine care was provided. As a growth indicators; the body weight, body length and head circumference were measured by an electronic weighing scale, a portable infantometer and tape measurement respectively. Heart rate and respiratory rate were measured using vital signs monitor. All measures were applied before, after one week of intervention as well as at discharge when the intervention was completed. Infants in both groups received their medical treatment in addition to conventional chest physical therapy program including modified postural drainage positions, vibration, percussion (using size zero neonatal face mask) and reflex rolling. An additional NDT including proper alignment of the head and neck following relaxation of the cervical extensors, slight chin tuck, anterior pulling of the scapula, centering of the arms and hands, backward slope of the pelvis, flexion of the trunk and legs was applied for only to the study group. The session for each group was performed for 20 minutes, daily till discharge.

Statistical analysis

Data were statistically described in terms of mean \pm standard deviation. Comparison between the groups was done using Student's t-test for independent samples for comparison of gestational age and hospitalization between groups. Chi-squared

test was carried out for comparison of sex distribution, consanguinity and mode of delivery (MOD) between groups. Mixed design two-way MANOVA was carried out for comparison of weight, length and HC within and between groups. Post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were carried out for subsequent multiple comparison. P values of ≤ 0.05 were considered statistically significant. All statistical calculations were done using computer program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) version 15 for Microsoft windows.

Results

Table (1) showed the subject characteristics of the control and study groups. There was no significant difference between both groups regarding gestational age, weight, height and sex distribution, consanguinity and mode of delivery (p > 0.05).

Results revealed that there was a significant interaction of treatment and time (F = 1.95, p = 0.04, η^2 = 0.18). There was a significant main effect of time (F = 105.02, p = 0.001, η^2 = 0.92). There was no significant main effect of treatment (F = 0.67, p = 0.66, η^2 = 0.03).

There is a significant increase of weight in both groups when it compared between one week and discharge as well as between admission and discharge (p < 0.05) with a significant difference between groups only after one week of intervention in favor for the study group. Regarding length, there is a significance increase of length only in the study group when compared between one week and discharge as well as between admission and discharge (p < 0.05) with no significance differences between groups. However, there is no significance change in HC either between groups or among the measurement periods for each group (p > 0.05) (Table 2). Results revealed a significant decrease in hospitalization in NICU for the study group when compared with that of control group (p < 0.001) (Table 3).

Table 1. Basic characteristics of the participants

	Study Group	Control Group	p-value		
Gestational age [weeks], Mean ± SD	33.71 ± 1.88	33.05 ± 2.35	0.11		
Weight [kg], Mean \pm SD	1.97 ± 0.53	1.81 ± 0.48	0.1		
Height [cm], Mean \pm SD	43.05 ± 3.74	41.9 ± 3.83	0.11		
Sex distribution, Number (%):					
Girls	29 (51.8%)	21 (40.4%)	0.22		
Boys	27 (48.2%)	31 (59.6%)	0.23		
Consanguinity, Number (%):					
Positive	9 (16.1%)	6 (11.5%)	0.40		
Negative	47 (83.9%)	46 (88.5%)	0.49		
Mode of delivery, Number (%):					
CS elective	6 (10.7%)	7 (13.5%)			
CS emergency	46 (82.1%)	34 (65.4%)	0.15		
NVD	2 (3.6%)	7 (13.5%)	0.15		
SVD	2 (3.6%)	4 (7.7%)			

SD: Standard deviation; P-value: Probability level; CS: Cesarean section; NVD: Normal vaginal delivery; SVD: Spontaneous vaginal delivery; %: Percentage.



Table 2. Within and between groups' comparison at admission, one week and at discharge

		Admission	1 week	Discharge	Admission vs 1 week	1 week vs Discharge	Admission vs Discharge
		Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	Mean ± SD	p-value	p-value	p-value
	Study group	1.97 ± 0.53	1.98 ± 0.56	2.1 ± 0.53	1	0.001*	0.001*
Weight (kg)	Control group	1.81 ± 0.48	1.74 ± 0.43	1.94 ± 0.38	0.1	0.001*	0.001*
	p-value	0.1	0.01*	0.08			
	Study group	43.05 ± 3.74	43.07 ± 3.77	43.48 ± 3.79	0.5	0.03*	0.02*
Length (cm)	Control group	41.9 ± 3.83	41.9 ± 3.83	42.17 ± 3.72	1	0.31	0.33
	p-value	0.11	0.11	0.07			
	Study group	30.82 ± 2.14	30.82 ± 2.14	31.07 ± 2.15	-	0.09	0.09
HC (cm)	Control group	30.15 ± 2.32	30.15 ± 2.32	30.36 ± 2.3	-	0.24	0.24
	p-value	0.12	0.12	0.1			

SD: Standard deviation. p-value: Probability level. HC: Head circumference. vs: Versus. *: Significant

Table 3. Comparison between groups regarding hospitalization in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

	Study Group Mean ± SD	Control Group Mean ± SD	MD	t-value	p-value
Hospitalization in NICU [days]	14.44 ± 10.5	20.98 ± 9.35	-6.54	-3.4	0.001*

SD: Standard deviation; MD: Mean difference; p-value: Probability level; NICU: Neonatal Intensive Care Unit; *: Significant

Discussion

Growth is a dynamic process, closely related to mental and social health as well as to physical aspects, and is also influenced by normal development in a reciprocal manner [6]. Among premature infants, those born with a low body weight in particu—lar are at great risk of insufficient growth during the first year. Premature infants who have not caught up with normal growth during early childhood are at higher risk of having developmental delays and medical problems than premature infants with normal growth during early childhood [17].

Premature infants born with an immature physiological status are more likely to experience growth retardation because they are placed in a different environment than the maternal uterus, which may cause problems with growth and development as their gestational age is shorter and birth weight smaller [17]. They also have difficult feeding due to unusual oral sensations related to feeding tubes, frequent medical interventions, secured airway for breathing, and excessively stretched posture of the neck and head due to their immature muscle development state [18].

According to [19], physical therapist tried to help premature infants with a high risk of growth delay to grow, by applying NDT program in addition to general nursing care. Their results revealed that additional NDT performed by a physical therapist was an effective intervention method for improving growth of the premature infants.

[20] reported that tactile stimulation, such as massage, increased the secretion of gastrin and insulin by enhancing the response of the vagus nerve, which increased the food intake

rate, thereby promoting the growth of premature infants. These findings suggest that, because the NDT program provided in this study involved complex sensory stimuli, including tactile stimulation, it was likely to be effective in weight gain and head circumference growth by affecting hormone secretion in premature infants.

[21] also reported that tactile motor stimulation was effective in increasing weight and reducing length of hospital stay for premature infants.

The growth indicators used in this study were weight, length and HC. This is because most of the growth indicators in infancy are mainly concerned with weight gain, and most of them judge pathological state by weight evaluation [7]. Therefore, growth status is usually assessed by weight, and rapid weight gain in premature infants may indicate shorter hospitalization stays [22]. [23] stated that most of the earlier conducted studies had used only weight gain as their outcome variable.

[24] monitored growth patterns of 267 premature infants and reported that smaller body weight, height, and HC is associated with severe prematurity, and that the uterine environment is more favorable for fetal growth than NICU environment, no matter how good it is.

[25] also pointed that moderate pressure massage with tactile stimulation can improve weight gain of premature neonates, and emphasized that, premature neonates with initial poor motor performance had significantly more improvement in motor and neurologic outcomes and decrease length of stay after applying massage when compared to those not receiving massage. These findings also agreed with [26] who suggested that



tactile and kinaesthetic stimulation are effective for promoting premature infant weight gain.

In the present study, physical therapist provided NDT to premature infants who were not able to stay in the maternal uterus for various reasons and, thus, they were in need of care in NICU. As a result, their weight gain at discharge was improved better and faster than the control group. This reveals that extra NDT performed by physical therapists, in addition to general nursing care in NICU, may be an effective intervention method for premature infants that can prevent medical problems related to poor growth in the future. In order to ensure the safe and universal application of NDT interventions that can help premature infants grow in the NICU, clinical training and education in emergencies related to premature infants should precede any implementation of this treatment.

Conclusion

As the majority of premature infants suffer from some form of developmental delay which requires an early intervention and based on the results of this study, early administration of NDT for such infants could enhance their development in the way that may enable them to catch up with their pears.

Further studies are required to evaluate the effect of NDT on extremely low birth weight premature infants.

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