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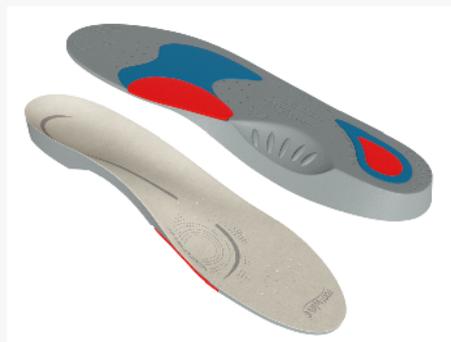
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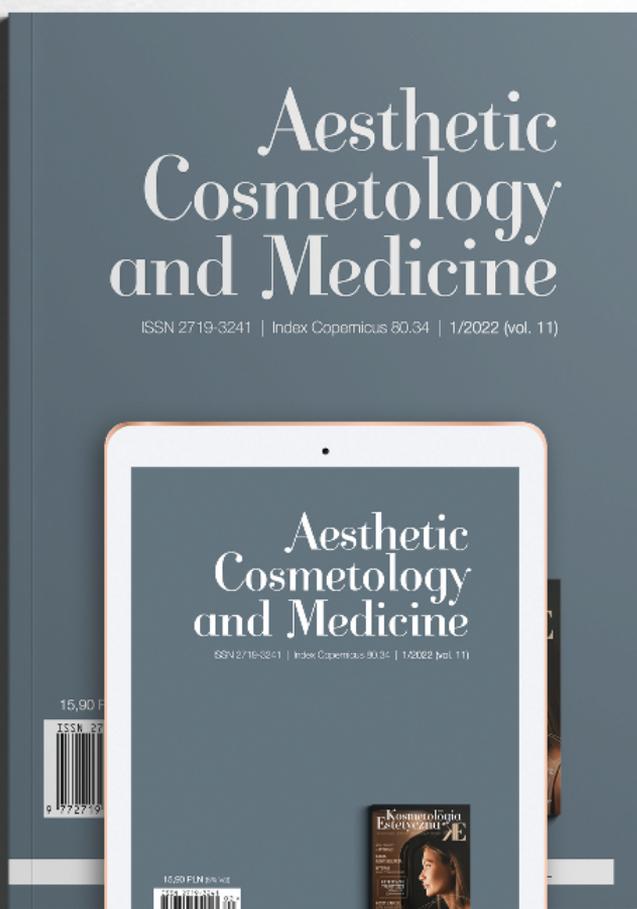
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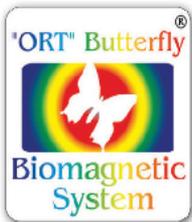
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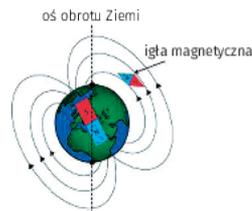
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Development of a functional training protocol to improve lower limb motor recovery in early sub-acute stroke patients

Opracowanie protokołu treningu funkcjonalnego w celu przyspieszenia powrotu do sprawności ruchowej kończyn dolnych u pacjentów z wczesnym podostrym udarem mózgu

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Abstract

Background. Functional training is a common intervention practiced in stroke rehabilitation. The efficacy of lower limb functional training to improve functions has been widely tested in patients with chronic stroke. Improvement in function generally does not reflect changes in motor recovery. The effect of this training on motor recovery has been less explored. Moreover, a standard protocol for lower limb functional training is elusive in literature.

Aim. To develop an intervention protocol of functional training for lower extremity to improve motor recovery and functions in acute and early subacute stroke patients.

Methods. Study was conducted in two phases. First phase involved literature review to identify the components for functional training for lower extremity in patients with stroke. Second phase involved two rounds of Delphi survey to design an intervention protocol. First round of Delphi survey was conducted to identify the functions of lower extremity that can be used as components of training and second round was conducted to receive the consensus on activities of lower extremity which can be practiced in acute and early subacute stroke patients.

Results. Functions of lower extremity and exercises of functional training which received consensus of at least 70% and above in Delphi survey are selected to design the protocol. Weight-bearing, postural control, sit to stand, stepping, walking, standing, manipulation function was selected to design activities for functional training.

Conclusion. A Functional training protocol was developed with activities for weight bearing, postural control, manipulation and walking function.

Key words:

stroke, physiotherapy, functional training, rehabilitation, task oriented exercise

Streszczenie

Wprowadzenie. Trening funkcjonalny jest powszechną metodą stosowaną w rehabilitacji po udarze mózgu. Skuteczność treningu funkcjonalnego kończyn dolnych w zakresie poprawy funkcji była powszechnie testowana u pacjentów z przewlekłym udarem mózgu. Poprawa funkcji na ogół nie odzwierciedla zmian w regeneracji motorycznej. Wpływ treningu na regenerację motoryczną nie został zbadany w takim samym stopniu. Co więcej, w literaturze brakuje standardowego protokołu treningu funkcjonalnego kończyn dolnych. **Cel.** Opracowanie protokołu interwencyjnego treningu funkcjonalnego kończyn dolnych w celu przyspieszenia regeneracji motorycznej i funkcji u pacjentów z ostrym udarem i wczesnym udarem podostrym.

Metody. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone w dwóch etapach. Pierwszy etap obejmował przegląd literatury w celu zidentyfikowania elementów treningu funkcjonalnego kończyn dolnych u pacjentów po udarze. Drugi etap obejmował dwie rundy ankiety Delphi w celu zaprojektowania protokołu interwencji. Pierwsza runda ankiety Delphi została przeprowadzona w celu zidentyfikowania funkcji kończyn dolnych, które mogą być wykorzystane jako elementy treningu; druga runda została przeprowadzona w celu uzyskania konsensusu w sprawie czynności kończyn dolnych, które można ćwiczyć u pacjentów z ostrym i wczesnym udarem podostrym.

Wyniki. Do opracowania protokołu wybrano funkcje kończyn dolnych i ćwiczenia treningu funkcjonalnego, które uzyskały konsensus co najmniej 70% i więcej w ankiecie Delphi. Obciążanie, kontrola postawy, wstawania z pozycji siedzącej, chodzenie po schodach, chodzenie, stanie, manipulacja zostały wybrane w celu zaprojektowania ćwiczeń do treningu funkcjonalnego.

Wniosek. Opracowano protokół treningu funkcjonalnego z ćwiczeniami dotyczącymi obciążania, kontroli postawy, manipulacji i chodzenia.

Słowa kluczowe

udar mózgu, fizjoterapia, trening funkcjonalny, rehabilitacja, ćwiczenia zadaniowe

Introduction

A goal-oriented or functional task can enhance motor learning and recovery after stroke. Motor learning process after stroke in spontaneous recovery phase leads to relearning of skills with practice and experience dependent plasticity [1]. Motor skill learning is enhanced if the attention is focused on the goal rather than the movement [2]. Functional MRI studies have shown that goal-oriented functional activities resulted in higher activation of somatosensory motor area, primary motor cortex, and parietal region and cerebellum, compared to non-functional movements [3].

Functional training has been widely tested and accepted to improve functional abilities of the patients with stroke [4-6]. The functional training in lower limb was focused on improving predominantly gait followed by balance abilities [4, 7, 8]. Majority of these studies have been conducted in patients with chronic stroke who could walk [9]. Few studies have been done with patients with sub-acute stroke [10-12]. The functional training given in these studies were specific to improve gait.

Effect of functional training on motor recovery of lower extremity is elusive in patients with acute and sub-acute stroke. We felt functional goal-directed activity for lower limb in the acute and early subacute phase of stroke is likely to facilitate motor recovery compared to training of isolated muscle contractions. The published functional training programs may not be suitable to patients with minimal or absent motor control in the lower extremity as they are designed for patients in late subacute and chronic stroke [7]. Hence, we intended to develop a functional training program suitable for patients in the acute and early subacute phase of stroke, especially with minimal motor control.

The aim of the study was to develop an intervention protocol of functional training for paretic lower extremity for patients with acute and early subacute stroke.

Methodology

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee: IEC-NI/18/JUL/65/37.

The intervention protocol of functional training for lower limb for early subacute stroke patients was developed in two phases. In the first phase, a structured literature review was used to identify the functions and activities used in functional training for lower limbs and outcome used to test the efficacy of intervention. The second phase of the study identified practicing Physiotherapists recommendations on lower limb activities for functional training through two rounds of Delphi survey.

Phase 1 of the study – Literature review and item generation

The literature search was conducted with the following keywords “Cerebrovascular Accident”, “Stroke”, “Hemiplegia”, “Functional training”, “Task specific training”, “Task oriented training”, “Circuit class training” in the database PubMed. The studies with patient population as stroke or hemiplegia; intervention included circuit class training or functional training or task oriented training or task specific training for lo-

wer extremity; published in English language were included for review. We searched for literature from the year 2000 to 2018 in the PubMed database. Books on stroke rehabilitation are searched for activities for goal oriented functional training.

Phase 2 of the study – Delphi survey

Delphi rounds generally involve anonymity and consecutive questions to decide with structured feedback. Two rounds of Delphi survey was conducted with Google forms. Therapist who predominantly treat patients with stroke and use functional training as a part of their therapy with minimum 10 years of clinical practice were contacted to participate in the survey. Fourteen Physiotherapists consented to participate. The identity of the Experts was kept confidential during the Delphi rounds to avoid participation bias.

In the first round of Delphi survey the experts consensus for the functions of the lower limb those can be included in the functional training program of acute and early subacute stroke patients was obtained. The Google form had twelve functions of the lower limb from the literature (Table 1). Those items which received consensus above 70% were considered for the next round of Delphi survey to plan for activities relevant to the function. In the second round of Delphi survey, we gave a list of functions suitable for acute and early sub-acute stroke patients with activities relevant to the functions for consensus. Activities that received consensus of 70% and above were listed for the functional training program for patients in the sub-acute phase of stroke (Table 2).

Results

Literature review

After removing duplicates and cross-referring, we obtained 1560 studies. Twenty-two studies met the inclusion criteria [7, 8, 13-32].

Review of literature identified the types of stroke population studied either early subacute, late subacute or chronic, interventional exercises given in form of task oriented or task specific or circuit class or functional training and the different functional and motor outcomes of the studies. Chronic stroke patients was studied in 13 studies, early and late subacute stroke patient population which was studied in 7 and 2 studies respectively. Early subacute population studied in clinical trials were mostly after 30 days post stroke and Rose D et al 2011 had done the study with 10 days post stroke patients [24]. No standardized exercise protocol was available for early subacute stroke patients in the literature. Few studies Salbach NM et al 2004, Outermans JC 2010 followed the Task oriented circuit class training protocol suggested by Dean C et al in 2000 [31, 33]. This study was done on 9 chronic stroke patients of 2 years post stroke duration. Components of task oriented circuit class training proposed by Dean C et al composed of ten workstations in a circuit incorporating activities as reaching tasks in sitting, sit to stand task on various chair heights, Stepping on blocks, heel lifts in standing, weight bearing in standing and reaching for objects down to floor from standing position, strengthening of lower extremity muscles with kinetron machine, walking in treadmill and slopes and stairs, Obstacle course walking [7].

Most of these may not be suitable for patients with acute and sub-acute with minimal or no motor control in lower limb.

Delphi survey

All the 14 experts participated in both the rounds of Delphi. In the first Delphi round functions of the lower extremity was listed for consensus (Table 1) and those which received 70% consensus was considered for developing functional training through the second round of Delphi. Among the functions listed weight-bearing, postural control, sit to stand, stereognosis, stepping, walking, standing, bed mobility, cycling, kicking, jumping, running received 70% above consensus as functions of the lower limb. Manipulation and self-care received

consensus less than 70% as a function of the lower limb. In the second round of Delphi, we listed goal-oriented activity for weight-bearing, postural control, gait facilitation and manipulation (Table 2). We included only these activities as they will be relevant and feasible for training in stroke patients with minimal motor control. Manipulation was included in the goal-oriented activity as we felt that lower extremities are used to manipulate objects in the environment, like pushing an object, pulling an object, sometimes picking up an object etc. Moreover, we found Davies, (2000) advocating lower limb exercises with manipulating medicine ball to facilitate motor control. Activities which received more than 70% agreement were used to develop the functional training program (Table 3).

Table 1. Expert consensus form 1 in Delphi round 1

Aim – The aim of the Delphi round 1 was to find out for the different functions of the lower extremities for developing a functional training program for early subacute stroke patients.

S.No	Functions of the lower extremities	Percentage of agreement
1.	Walking	100 %
2.	Standing	100 %
3.	Stepping	100 %
4.	Sit to stand	100 %
5.	Recreational and sporting activities – Cycling, kicking.	100 %
6.	Weight bearing	93%
7.	Postural control	93%
8.	Potential tasks – Jumping, running, carry and walk	93%
9.	Bed Mobility	86%
10.	Self care	57%
11.	Manipulation	43%
12.	Stereognosis	21%

Table 2 – Expert Consensus form 2 in Delphi round 2

Aim – The aim of Delphi round 2 was to design an intervention protocol with the goal oriented functional activities of lower extremities which can be applicable in acute and early subacute stroke patients.

S.No	Functions of the lower extremities	Percentage of agreement
1.	Weight bearing	
a.	Standing –to maintain static standing position in wide base of support, Narrow Base of support, and Tandem feet position as progression	100 %
b.	Sit to stand – to practice sit to stand repetitions	92 %
2.	Postural control	
a.	Sitting on the bed side and reaching towards normal side.	77 %
b.	Sitting on a swiss ball (unstable surface) with feet on the ground.	54 %
c.	Sitting on a swiss ball (unstable surface) and reaching towards normal side	46 %
d.	Sitting on a high couch and reaching towards normal side	69 %
e.	Standing and reaching forward to touch or hold an object	85 %
f.	Standing and reaching sideways to touch or hold an object	85 %

S.No	Functions of the lower extremities	Percentage of agreement
3.	Walking	
a.	Shifting weight between lower limbs	77 %
b.	Controlling the weight on paretic lower extremity while normal leg is moved	85 %
c.	Moving the paretic lower extremity forward from a backward position similar to push off	85 %
d.	Walking – carry and walk, Talk and walk (Progression)	85 %
4.	Manipulation	
a.	Sitting on a high couch and moving a small ball kept under the paretic lower extremity (foot)	77 %
b.	Sitting and moving a small stool with the paretic lower extremity	85 %
c.	Standing with paretic lower extremity on a small ball and controlling its movement	77 %
d.	Kicking a ball in high sitting	85 %
e.	Feeling textures below the feet	77 %
f.	Picking up an object like a small piece of cloth with the forefoot	54 %

Table 3. The intervention protocol of Functional training for the paretic lower extremity in early subacute stroke patients

- 1. Weight bearing** – to improve weight bearing in the affected lower extremity, following functional activity is recommended.
 - a. Standing – to maintain static standing position in wide base of support, Narrow Base of support, and Tandem feet position as progression
 - b. Sit to stand – to practice sit to stand
- 2. Postural control** – it is the ability to control and maintain an upright body posture while performing functional activities in sitting, standing or during mobility. The practice of functional reaching tasks in sitting and standing position is recommended.
 - a. Sitting on the bed side with feet on the floor and reaching for an object in a forward direction.
 - b. Sitting on the bed side with feet on the floor and reaching for an object in a sideways direction
 - c. Standing (supported/unsupported) and reaching forward to touch or hold an object
 - d. Standing (supported/unsupported) and reaching sideways to touch or hold an object
- 3. Walking**
 - a. Shifting weight between lower limbs in standing position.
 - b. In standing position, controlling the weight on paretic lower extremity while normal leg is moved
 - c. Moving the paretic lower extremity forward from a backward position similar to push off
 - d. Walking – carry and walk, Talk and walk (progression)
- 4. Manipulation** – A manipulative skills like kicking, pushing an object is practiced by lower extremities as a functional activities
 - a. Sitting on a high couch and moving a small ball kept under the paretic lower extremity (foot)
 - b. Sitting and moving a small stool with the paretic lower extremity
 - c. Standing position and placing the paretic lower extremity on a small ball and controlling its movement
 - d. Sitting position with feet on the floor and kicking a ball with paretic lower extremity
 - e. Feeling different textures below the feet

Discussion

We developed a functional training program for the lower limb for early subacute stroke patients and validation of the exercises was done from the experts consensus. The program has goal-directed activities, which is expected to provoke muscle contraction in lower extremities. Goal-oriented functional movement is expected to activate larger areas of the brain than just repetitive movements [34]. Goal-oriented or function-

nal training can be considered different from task-specific training. Maier, Ballester and Verschure, (2019) states that terms task-oriented training and goal-oriented functional training are interchangeably used in research [35]. While task-oriented training focuses on an accusation of specific task like gait, goal-oriented training uses a variety of tasks or activities that achieves a goal, thus permits the patient to use a variety of synergistic movements. Thus goal-oriented training could faci-

litate a variety of muscle work if designed appropriately. We have attempted to combine a set of goal-directed activities to facilitate lower extremity muscle contractions and likely to facilitate motor recovery and functions of lower extremity such as weight bearing, postural control, manipulation and walking.

In this functional training program, we used goal-oriented activities which can provoke muscle contractions in lower extremities. Weight bearing through an extremity is likely to facilitate muscle contraction. Brouwer and Ambury, (1994) reported that weight bearing improves the corticospinal tract activity [36]. Loading related afferent inputs triggering corticospinal tracts excitability to tibialis anterior muscle has been reported by Kamibayashi et al., (2009) [37]. Hence, we anticipate that goal oriented activities which provokes weight bearing through lower limb is likely to facilitate corticospinal tract activity.

We used sit to stand and standing to improve weight bearing function. A review study was conducted by Mohammadi R et al in 2018 which stated about the changes in muscle activity on paretic and non-paretic lower limb while sit to stand task in stroke patients. Practice of sit to stand leads to onset of muscle contraction of non-paretic and paretic side at the initiation of sit to stand task from the chair and reach to maximum as the patient seat off from the sitting position as shown by electromyographic activity in group of muscles of lower limb [38]. We assume that this function is likely to provoke muscle contractions in paretic lower extremities in a patient with acute and early subacute stroke. This function is a common component of circuit class training in chronic stroke survivors. Dean C et al (2000) had used the sit to stand, reaching task in standing position, standing with feet in narrow base of support and tandem in their task oriented circuit class training for chronic stroke patients [7].

Lower extremities help in postural control by adjusting the centre of gravity and base of support. Lower limb muscle activity has been recorded during sitting and reaching activities [39]. Sivakumar and Jena, (2020) proposed sitting and reaching as a training to provoke dorsiflexor activity in patients with stroke [40]. Carr and Shepherd, (1990) recommended activities like lean standing on a wall and moving away to provoke dorsiflexor activity [41]. Hence, in the training program developed, we included a few activities like sitting on bedside and reaching towards an object in a forward and side-ways direction and standing reaching tasks which are likely to provoke lower extremity muscle contraction as a part of postural reflex mechanism.

As the gait was considered as primary function of lower extremity, we assumed that goal oriented activities related to

gait is likely to provoke lower extremity muscle contractions. The functional activities which was included to improve walking are shifting weight between lower limbs, controlling the weight on paretic lower limb while normal leg is moved, moving the paretic lower limb forward from a backward position similar to push off and walking practice with carrying an object in hand and obstacle course walk. Kim B et al (2016) in a study on chronic stroke patients has incorporated obstacle walking and treadmill walking in task oriented circuit training [15]. In a study by Choi J U et al (2015) reported different forms of activities like indoor walking training on parallel bars, outdoor walking practice on level surface ground and unpaved ground and a slope surface with a cane, and stair climbing training in chronic patients [19]. Most of the studies had a chronic stroke population which trained with walking forward and backwards, walking on a obstacle course and stair walking. English C et al 2007 and Rose D et al in 2011 had included the obstacle course walk, stair and ramp walking as a part of circuit class therapy in early subacute stroke patients [24, 27].

Manipulation of objects by lower extremity is part of activities of daily living. We use our lower extremity to move or push objects, and pick up objects from the floor. However, training to improve this function is not seen in literature. P. M. Davies, (2000) recommends activities like controlling or moving a medicine ball by paretic lower extremity [42]. We included activities like kicking a ball and controlling the ball by paretic leg. We assume that these activities can provoke muscle contraction in the paretic lower limb.

The activities in this functional training are selected considering the absence or minimal muscle control in patients with acute and sub-acute stroke. The activities are given with initial manual guidance and as a progression guidance may be decreased. Complexity can be added to the task as the muscle contraction improves in the paretic lower limb.

Conclusion

We developed a functional training program to be implemented in early subacute phase of stroke. The program has activities related to weight bearing through paretic lower limb, postural reactions involving lower extremities, manipulation with lower extremities and walking functions of the lower limb.

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