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The Role Of Physiotherapy In Management Of Low Back Pain

Sultan Saleh Alakeel[1] , Ziyad Fahad Alsuwayyid[2] , Mohammed Dhafer Farraj Alshehri[3] , Abdulaziz Yahya Abdullah Mousa[4] , Khalid Mohammed N Alshalawi[5] , Tawfiq Abdallh Alotabib[6], Salman Mohammed Alharissy[7], Abdullah Mohammed Alshehri[7], Fahad Hassan Atain[7], Reem Saad Alattallah[7], Abdulrahman Abdullah Alghamdi[7], Sultanah Abdulaziz Alabduljabbar[8], Saud Owaidh Alsuwat[9], Reema Mutab Al-Muqawwad[10], Fatmah Ibrahim Alenazi[11], Mohammed Ahmed M Alsayed[12], Bassam Sameer Samkari[13]

[1]Physical therapy, Riyadh, Security forces hospital
[2]Physical therapy, Riyadh, Security forces hospital
[3]Physical therapy, Riyadh, Security forces hospital
[4]Master of Rehabilitation Science, Riyadh, Security forces hospital
[5]Physical therapy, Riyadh- Al-Quwayiyah, Al-Quwayiyah Hospitaz
[6]Physical Therapy home care, AlQuwayiyah General Hospital, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[7]Physical Therapy, AlQuwayiyah General Hospital, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[8]Physiotherapy, King Salman Hospital, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
[9]Physiotherapy, king abdul aziz specialist hospital, Taif, Saudi Arabia
[10]Physical therapy specialist, King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital, Al-Jouf, Saudi Arabia
[11]Physical Therapy Technician, King Khalid Hospital, Tabuk, Saudi Arabia
[12]Physical therapy specialist, South qunfudah general hospital, Makkah, Saudi Arabia
[13]Physiotherapist, Eradah and Mental Health Hospital in Al-Jouf, Sakaka

ABSTRACT

Low back pain (LBP) poses a significant global health challenge, affecting up to 80% of individuals in their lifetime and often resulting in functional impairment, socioeconomic consequences, and psychological distress. This study investigates the effectiveness of various physiotherapy techniques in managing chronic low back pain (CLBP), defined as pain lasting longer than 12 weeks. It explores how these interventions impact patients' pain levels, functional abilities, and overall quality of life. With a focus on multidisciplinary approaches, including exercise, manual therapy, and reflex therapy, the research emphasizes the need for tailored treatment strategies that cater to diverse patient demographics. The study also assesses preventative measures against CLBP and aims to identify optimal treatment protocols to enhance recovery and minimize recurrence. Findings highlight that while conservative treatments, including physical therapy and medication, can provide symptomatic relief, a combined approach integrating self-management strategies and psychosocial support appears most beneficial for long-term outcomes. The necessity for public health programs and improved healthcare pathways to educate and support patients in managing low back pain effectively is underscored as essential for future strategies. These insights contribute to the evolving landscape of LBP management and advocate for evidence-based interdisciplinary care.

KEYWORDS: Low Back Pain, Musculoskeletal Manipulations, Reflexotherapy, Exercise, Muscle Strength, practice guidelines.

1. Introduction

Low back pain is a significant health issue that affects 80% of individuals at some point in their lives, leading to functional impairment and decreased productivity [1]. Among patients with low back pain, 85% experience non-specific symptoms and signs without a definitive diagnosis, prognosis, or treatment plan [2]. Chronic low back pain (CLBP) refers to back pain persisting for more than 12 weeks, negatively influencing functional capabilities, socioeconomic factors, occupational performance, and psychological well-being [3]. Given the numerous adverse effects linked to CLBP, it is suggested that relying on a single treatment method for low back pain is unlikely to be effective; instead, a multidisciplinary approach to treatment is recommended. Various conservative treatment options, including exercise, physical therapy, and medications, are employed to manage CLBP. These approaches aim to enhance mobility, alleviate pain, and improve both functional and psychological well-being [4].

Exercise is a primary treatment option for CLBP and has been found to diminish both the duration and frequency of back pain episodes [5]. Research indicates that physiotherapy techniques such as hot packs, ice massages, diathermy, ultrasound therapy, and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) can reduce inflammation and alleviate musculoskeletal discomfort and joint stiffness, thereby providing symptomatic relief [6]. Furthermore, medical treatments have also proven effective in improving symptoms associated with CLBP [7]. However, the effectiveness of a combined treatment strategy that incorporates both physical therapy and medical interventions for CLBP has yet to be adequately established.

The goal of managing low back pain (LBP) is to alleviate discomfort, facilitate early return to work for patients, and avert the onset of chronic disability. Pain management is achieved through conservative approaches, pharmacological interventions such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, thermotherapy, and electrotherapy, alongside functional restoration of the spine via exercise. Various passive treatment modalities, including manual therapy, reflex therapy, and Kinesio Taping techniques, are utilized to alleviate pain and enhance the biomechanics of the lumbar area. In the realm of active treatment, core stabilization exercises constitute one of the exercise regimens for managing chronic low back pain (CLBP) [8]. When core muscles function effectively and in a coordinated manner, they help prevent excessive movement of the pelvis and spine during limb motions, control abnormal and excessive loads, and support the maintenance of proper posture.

A recently developed treatment technique is reflex therapy, which refers to the natural capacity of the body to facilitate healing through manual deep stroking techniques applied to specific body areas, particularly the feet [9]. Research on this topic has yielded mixed results. Some studies suggest that reflex therapy may show potential as a therapeutic option for managing LBP [10,11].

Objectives:

This study aimed to:

1. Assess the effectiveness of various physiotherapy techniques in reducing pain and improving function in patients with low back pain.
2. Investigate how physiotherapy impacts patients' quality of life, including pain relief, disability levels, and overall satisfaction with treatment.
3. Explore the preventative measures for low back pain
4. Identify best practices, optimal treatment frequencies, and duration of physiotherapy interventions to maximize recovery and minimize recurrence of low back pain among different patient demographics.

The role of physiotherapy in the management of both acute and chronic low back pain:

For acute non-specific low back pain without serious underlying pathology, the primary needs are initial reassurance, encouragement to remain active, and selfmanagement strategies. Self-management may involve practices such as selfdirected exercises and educational resources, which can include reading booklets or participating in online courses related to low back pain. Primary conservative treatments typically favored consist of manual therapy, exercise, and the application of superficial heat. Evidence suggests that low-level laser therapy does not provide a significant advantage over sham laser treatment for pain relief [12]. Additionally, there is limited evidence indicating that acupuncture may have a modest effect on managing acute low back pain. The McKenzie method of mechanical diagnosis and therapy (MDT) aims to classify patients into distinct subgroups (such as derangement, dysfunction, or postural syndrome) to guide treatment with targeted exercises and postural advice. In cases of acute low back pain, moderate to highquality evidence suggests that MDT does not outperform other rehabilitation approaches in reducing pain and disability [13].

When considering pharmacological treatments for acute low back pain, options may include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), skeletal muscle relaxants, and weak opioids for short-term use (with paracetamol not being recommended). Generally, most patients with acute low back pain experience improvement whether or not they undergo treatment. The degree of pain relief is typically small to moderate and tends to be short-lived. Progress should be assessed within 7–14 days, and patients should be advised to resume their normal activities or referred to an individual or group exercise program if necessary [14].

There has been no recommendation as to the level of pain allowed during exercise, and to the level of pain tolerated at each stage of the exercise progression. A systematic review protocol has recently been published in order to study the effect of using a differentiation of exercises based on the amount of low back pain experienced by patients in primary care [15].

In chronic low back without serious pathology, recommended primary conservative physical treatment preferences include exercise, yoga, biofeedback, progressive relaxation, massage, manual therapy, and interdisciplinary rehabilitation.

In spinal pain with radiculopathy, exercise and spinal manipulation can be used. However, some guidelines do not endorse the use of passive therapies, or make them optional in patients unresponsive to other treatments. These include massage, spinal manipulation or mobilization, and acupuncture [16].

Other passive physical or electrical methods, such as short-wave diathermy, interferential therapy transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), back supports, traction, and ultrasound have been largely found to be ineffective, and are not recommended [17].

Association with psychosocial factors:

In the management of back pain by physiotherapists, there is a link to psychosocial elements, including self-efficacy, catastrophizing, fear of movement, and the resulting pain and disability outcomes. A recent systematic review examined the psychosocial factors influencing changes in pain and disability outcomes among patients with chronic low back pain receiving treatment from physiotherapists. The review identified a relationship between psychosocial factors like self-efficacy, catastrophizing, and fear of movement and the outcomes related to pain and disability [18].

McKenzie Method of Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy (MDT):

The McKenzie method is widely recognized as an effective approach for managing back pain. It emphasizes self-management through the correction of posture and frequent repetition of end-

range exercise movements. A key feature of the McKenzie method in addressing back pain is the categorization and identification of nonspecific spinal pain into uniform subgroups. These subgroups are determined by how patients' symptoms respond similarly to mechanical forces. The classifications consist of postural syndrome, dysfunction syndrome, derangement syndrome, or "other," with tailored treatment strategies developed for each subgroup [19]. Using the information obtained from the McKenzie Method of Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy (MDT) assessment, the clinician will then prescribe specific exercises and advice regarding postures to adopt and postures to temporarily avoid. A recent literature review with meta-analysis in patients with chronic LBP found moderate- to high-quality evidence that MDT was superior to other rehabilitation interventions in reducing pain and disability, but was dependent on the type of intervention used for comparison to MDT [20].

Preventative measures:

Public health initiatives aimed at combating obesity and sedentary lifestyles should be established, offering a platform to mitigate the impact of chronic low back pain (CLBP) on everyday activities. In the context of CLBP, much of the evidence regarding prevention and treatment originates from high-income nations. It remains uncertain whether these guideline recommendations are relevant for low-income and middleincome countries. Additionally, the prioritization of public health programs will vary significantly between high-income and lower-income countries. A significant challenge in modifying health pathways is related to the existing healthcare reimbursement models. It is beneficial to have a complete mapping of the healthcare pathway for low back pain, from initial contact through to specialized treatment [21].

Healthcare professionals ought to provide ongoing education about the causes, mechanisms, natural history, and prognosis of low back pain, as well as encourage the advantages of physical activity and exercise [22].

Exercise alone or in combination with education has shown moderate-quality evidence that this is effective for prevention of LBP. With intensive programs, exercise then can be focused on secondary prevention [23].

In 2014, a systematic review and meta-analysis found only four pediatric trials in pediatric low back pain. This casts doubt regarding the evidence for treatment of back pain in children. There was moderate-quality evidence that education was not effective in children. There was very low quality evidence that ergonomically designed furniture prevented low back pain [24].

Future Strategies:

Public health initiatives must focus on educating the community about preventing low back pain. Additionally, there may be a need to modify policies related to disability and compensation claims. It is essential to devise and implement strategies that address modifiable risk factors associated with disabling low back pain. Both international and national policymakers should allocate funds and promote initiatives aimed at preventing low back pain.

Healthcare pathways should be established to ensure that patients can access the appropriate healthcare professionals who can provide the correct treatment in a timely manner. Enhancing the training of healthcare providers may help reduce unnecessary medical interventions. Clinical pathways ought to be redesigned to achieve best practices, and measures to reduce work-related disability should be integrated into both healthcare and occupational settings [25].

Early recognition and the provision of suitable education of low back pain patients at risk for persistence of pain and disability are needed. Passive methods (rest, medications) are associated with worsening disability. Active strategies such as exercise are related to decreased disability. Practice needs to be brought into line with the evidence, and activity and function (plus

work participation) should be encouraged. The use of active multidisciplinary rehabilitation should focus on selfmanagement and healthy lifestyles, and assist in a return to work. The low back pain area lacks evidence of effective implementation strategies. Implementation trials in the future should assume best-practice implementation research methodology, making use of the Standards for Reporting Implementation Studies of complex interventions guidelines [26].

2. Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study underscores the complexity of managing chronic low back pain (CLBP) and highlights the necessity of a multidisciplinary approach that combines various physiotherapy techniques. The evidence suggests that interventions such as exercise, manual therapy, and the McKenzie Method can significantly reduce pain and improve functional outcomes for patients suffering from CLBP. Additionally, addressing psychosocial factors is crucial in enhancing recovery and overall patient satisfaction. Importantly, the study advocates for the implementation of public health initiatives that promote preventive measures, emphasizing the need for education on self-management and the benefits of physical activity. Future strategies must focus on optimizing treatment pathways and ensuring that healthcare professionals are wellequipped to provide evidence-based care, ultimately aiming to reduce disability and enhance the quality of life for individuals affected by low back pain.

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