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An overview of the nursing-physiotherapist Interdisciplinary Approaches to Stroke Rehabilitation

Mohammed Abdulla Albahckaly[1]
Mohammed Ali Alshaeri[2]
Nouf Hussain Alharthi[3]
Tahani Abdullah Noaman[4]
BASIM IBRHIM AHMED ZEDAN[5]
Sultan Saeed Almurayri[6]
Samah Abdullah Alhamad[7]
Amal Moneeb Alkhateeb[8]
Joharah Ali Alalasi[9]
Abubaker Mohammed Al Ameer[10]
Hassan Mohammef Al Amerr[11]
Reem Mohammed Alsaadi[12]
Sahar Musaed Alomairi[13]
Reem Saeed Almutairi[14]
Alanoud Ali Sharahili[15]

1. PhysiotherapyTechnician, Eradah complex for mental health
2. Physiotherapy, Physiotherapy technician, rabigh general hospital
3. Physiotherapy, Physiotherapy technician, Rabigh general hospital
4. Physiotherapy, Physiotherapist, Eradah and mental Health Complex - Eradah services
5. PhysiotherapyTechnician, Eradah complex for mental health
6. Physiotherapy Techncian, Eradah complex for mental health
7. Physiotherapy, physiotherapist technician, Eradah and mental health complex
8. Physiotherapy Technician, Eradah complex for mental health
9. Physical therapy Technician, Eradah & mental health complex
10. King Abdulaziz Hospital , Staff Nurse
11. King Fahad Hospital, Staff nurse
12. nurse, Alnaeem primary healthcare
13. Nursing specialist, King Abdullah medical city
14. MCH, Nurse specialist
15. Registrar Nurse, Abu Arish General Hospital

Abstract
Stroke is a leading cause of long-term disability worldwide, necessitating comprehensive rehabilitation to restore function and improve quality of life. This paper explores the interdisciplinary approaches to stroke rehabilitation, focusing on the collaboration between nurses and physiotherapists. These professionals bring complementary expertise: nurses provide continuous monitoring, medical care, and psychosocial support, while physiotherapists specialize in physical rehabilitation through mobility restoration and functional training.The review highlights the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, including improved functional recovery, enhanced patient satisfaction, and reduced hospital stays. Evidence-based practices such as task-oriented training, early mobilization protocols, and psychosocial interventions are examined, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrated care models. However, challenges such as communication gaps, role ambiguity, and resource constraints remain barriers to optimal collaboration.

Introduction

Stroke remains a leading cause of disability and a major public health challenge globally, with an estimated 12.2 million new cases each year and 101 million people living with the aftermath of stroke worldwide (World Stroke Organization, 2023). This neurological condition often results in long-term physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments, necessitating a structured and multifaceted rehabilitation

process. Effective rehabilitation is critical in enhancing recovery, reducing dependency, and improving quality of life for stroke survivors (Langhorne et al., 2020).

Rehabilitation in stroke care is inherently interdisciplinary, requiring the integration of expertise from various healthcare professionals, including physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and social workers. Among these, nurses and physiotherapists play central roles in delivering patient-centered care. Nurses provide continuous support through health monitoring, education, and psychosocial care, while physiotherapists focus on motor recovery, mobility enhancement, and functional independence (Pollock et al., 2014). Their collaboration is vital in addressing the complex needs of stroke survivors, which often span medical, physical, and emotional domains.

Interdisciplinary approaches, characterized by shared decision-making and coordinated care planning, have been shown to significantly improve outcomes in stroke rehabilitation. Such collaboration reduces hospital stays, enhances functional recovery, and promotes patient satisfaction (Luker et al., 2016). Nurses and physiotherapists, through their complementary roles, ensure that patients receive comprehensive care tailored to their specific needs.

However, despite the recognized benefits, challenges persist in implementing interdisciplinary rehabilitation. Communication barriers, role ambiguities, and resource limitations often hinder optimal collaboration (Aziz et al., 2017). These challenges underscore the need for well-defined strategies to strengthen teamwork and improve interdisciplinary care delivery in stroke rehabilitation settings.

This review aims to examine the intersection of nursing and physiotherapy in stroke rehabilitation, highlighting their collaborative roles, evidence-based practices, and the impact of interdisciplinary care on patient outcomes. By exploring the challenges and potential strategies for enhancing collaboration, this review seeks to provide insights into optimizing care for stroke survivors.

Review:

Stroke rehabilitation is a complex and structured process aimed at reducing disability and enhancing the quality of life of stroke survivors. According to Langhorne et al. (2020), effective rehabilitation programs are crucial for regaining functional independence and minimizing the physical, cognitive, and emotional impairments caused by stroke. Rehabilitation efforts span across various disciplines, with nurses and physiotherapists forming the cornerstone of care delivery. These two professions contribute to holistic recovery by addressing both the medical and functional needs of patients.

The growing emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration in healthcare highlights the importance of shared roles in stroke rehabilitation. Interdisciplinary approaches are defined by the integration of expertise from multiple disciplines to achieve common goals, ensuring patient-centered care that is both efficient and effective (Aziz et al., 2017). While physiotherapists specialize in restoring mobility and physical function, nurses focus on continuous care, education, and complication prevention. When these roles are coordinated, they lead to improved outcomes, including faster recovery times, reduced hospital stays, and enhanced patient satisfaction.

2. Roles and Contributions of Nurses and Physiotherapists

2.1 Nurses' Contributions

Nurses play a pivotal role in the acute and chronic phases of stroke recovery. Their responsibilities include:

- **Monitoring and Assessment**: Nurses assess vital signs, neurological status, and overall health conditions. Continuous monitoring helps detect complications such as infections, pressure ulcers, and deep vein thrombosis (DVT) early (Clarke & Forster, 2015).
- **Psychosocial Support**: Emotional support is integral to stroke care, as patients often experience anxiety and depression. Nurses provide counseling and facilitate connections with mental health resources.
- **Education**: Educating patients and families about stroke risk factors, lifestyle modifications, and the importance of adherence to rehabilitation plans is another critical role of nurses (Luker et al., 2016).

- **Coordination of Care**: Nurses serve as the bridge between various disciplines, ensuring that care plans are executed smoothly and efficiently.

2.2 Physiotherapists' Contributions

Physiotherapists focus on the physical rehabilitation of stroke patients, addressing deficits in strength, balance, and mobility. Key responsibilities include:

- **Motor Recovery**: Using techniques such as task-oriented training, physiotherapists work on regaining functional movement, particularly in the upper and lower limbs (Pollock et al., 2014).
- **Functional Independence**: Strategies such as gait re-education and the use of assistive devices help patients regain independence in activities of daily living (ADLs).
- **Prevention of Secondary Complications**: By promoting early mobilization and regular physical activity, physiotherapists reduce the risk of complications like contractures and muscle atrophy (Bernhardt et al., 2015).

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3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Its Impact

Interdisciplinary collaboration between nurses and physiotherapists is essential for ensuring comprehensive care in stroke rehabilitation. This partnership involves shared decision-making, regular communication, and coordinated implementation of care plans.

3.1 Enhanced Functional Recovery

Research consistently demonstrates that interdisciplinary approaches improve functional outcomes in stroke rehabilitation. For example, a study by Gittler and Davis (2018) revealed that stroke patients treated by collaborative teams were more likely to achieve independence in mobility and self-care activities compared to those receiving standard care.

3.2 Increased Patient Satisfaction

Patients and families often value the integrated efforts of nurses and physiotherapists. Luker et al. (2016) reported that interdisciplinary care improved patient trust and reduced anxiety, particularly during the transition from hospital to home.

3.3 Reduced Length of Hospital Stay

Effective collaboration minimizes delays in care and facilitates early discharge. Langhorne et al. (2020) highlighted that early rehabilitation protocols involving both nurses and physiotherapists led to shorter hospital stays and reduced healthcare costs.

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4. Evidence-Based Practices in Collaborative Stroke Rehabilitation

4.1 Task-Oriented Training

Task-oriented training focuses on improving specific activities such as walking, dressing, and eating. Physiotherapists lead these sessions, while nurses reinforce these skills during daily care routines. Pollock et al. (2014) demonstrated that task-oriented training significantly improves motor function and ADL performance.

4.2 Early Mobilization Protocols

Early mobilization is a critical intervention in stroke care. Nurses and physiotherapists work together to encourage movement within the first 24-48 hours post-stroke. Bernhardt et al. (2015) found that early mobilization reduced the incidence of pneumonia, DVT, and pressure ulcers, while also improving long-term neurological outcomes.

4.3 Psychosocial Interventions

The emotional and psychological well-being of stroke survivors is integral to their recovery. Clarke and Forster (2015) emphasized the role of nurses in providing emotional support, which complements the physical rehabilitation efforts of physiotherapists.

4.4 Education and Empowerment

Education is a shared responsibility between nurses and physiotherapists. While physiotherapists educate patients on exercise regimens and physical health, nurses provide guidance on medication adherence, nutrition, and lifestyle changes (Luker et al., 2016).

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5. Challenges in Interdisciplinary Collaboration

5.1 Communication Barriers

Miscommunication among team members can lead to inconsistencies in care delivery. Aziz et al. (2017) highlighted that differences in terminology and professional perspectives often create misunderstandings between nurses and physiotherapists.

5.2 Role Clarity

Unclear boundaries in roles and responsibilities may result in overlaps or gaps in care. For instance, both nurses and physiotherapists may assume responsibility for patient education, leading to redundancy or missed opportunities.

5.3 Resource Constraints

Staffing shortages and limited access to rehabilitation facilities pose significant challenges to interdisciplinary care. Langhorne et al. (2020) noted that resource limitations often force teams to prioritize certain aspects of care over others.

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6. Strategies for Improving Collaboration

6.1 Regular Interdisciplinary Meetings

Scheduled meetings allow team members to discuss patient progress, share insights, and align care strategies. Luker et al. (2016) emphasized that regular communication improves team cohesion and patient outcomes.

6.2 Cross-Disciplinary Training

Training programs that educate nurses and physiotherapists about each other's roles enhance mutual respect and understanding. Clarke and Forster (2015) recommended simulation-based training as an effective method for fostering collaboration.

6.3 Use of Technology

Electronic health records (EHR) and telemedicine platforms facilitate seamless communication and coordination among team members. Aziz et al. (2017) highlighted the potential of digital tools to enhance interdisciplinary care.

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7. Future Directions and Research Gaps

While existing literature underscores the benefits of interdisciplinary care, several areas warrant further investigation:

- **Long-Term Outcomes**: Few studies examine the long-term effects of interdisciplinary approaches on stroke survivors' quality of life.
- **Economic Impact**: Additional research is needed to quantify the cost-effectiveness of collaborative care models.
- **Policy Development**: Future efforts should focus on creating guidelines that prioritize and support interdisciplinary care in stroke rehabilitation.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Stroke rehabilitation is a multifaceted process requiring a coordinated effort from various healthcare professionals. Among these, the interdisciplinary collaboration between nurses and physiotherapists stands out as a critical component of patient-centered care. This review has demonstrated that by integrating their unique skills and knowledge, nurses and physiotherapists can significantly improve the functional, emotional, and social recovery of stroke survivors.

1. Collaborative Contributions: Nurses and physiotherapists contribute complementary expertise that addresses the diverse needs of stroke patients. Nurses focus on continuous monitoring, complication prevention, education, and psychosocial support, ensuring that patients are medically stable and emotionally prepared for rehabilitation. Physiotherapists, on the other hand, lead efforts to restore mobility, balance, and functional independence through evidence-based physical interventions. Their shared goal of holistic recovery enables the seamless integration of medical and rehabilitative care.

2. Evidence of Effectiveness: The literature reviewed underscores the significant benefits of interdisciplinary approaches in stroke rehabilitation. Collaborative care has been shown to:

- Enhance functional recovery through task-oriented training and early mobilization protocols.
- Improve patient satisfaction by addressing both physical and emotional needs.
- Reduce hospital stays and healthcare costs through efficient, coordinated interventions.

3. Challenges to Collaboration: Despite its advantages, interdisciplinary care faces barriers such as communication gaps, unclear role delineation, and resource constraints. These challenges can hinder the effective implementation of collaborative practices, potentially compromising patient outcomes. Addressing these obstacles is critical to realizing the full potential of interdisciplinary rehabilitation.

4. Recommendations for Improvement: To enhance collaboration, strategies such as regular interdisciplinary meetings, cross-disciplinary training, and the use of technology must be prioritized. These measures can foster better communication, mutual understanding, and efficiency in care delivery. Furthermore, healthcare systems must invest in policies and resources that support interdisciplinary care models, ensuring that they are sustainable and accessible.

While current evidence highlights the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration, more research is needed to explore its long-term impact on stroke survivors' quality of life and functional independence. Future studies should also investigate the economic benefits of collaborative care and develop standardized guidelines for its implementation across diverse healthcare settings.

Conclusion: The integration of nursing and physiotherapy in stroke rehabilitation represents a paradigm shift towards holistic, patient-centered care. By leveraging their respective strengths, nurses and physiotherapists can address the complex and multifaceted needs of stroke survivors, ultimately enhancing recovery outcomes. Overcoming the challenges of collaboration and investing in strategies to strengthen interdisciplinary practices will pave the way for more effective, efficient, and equitable stroke care in the future. Through continued innovation and commitment to teamwork, healthcare providers can empower stroke survivors to achieve their highest potential for recovery and independence.

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