Author’s response to reviews

Title: The effect of adding TENS to stretch on improvement of ankle range of motion in inactive patients in intensive care units: A pilot trial

Authors:
MohammadBagher Shamsi (mbshamsi@yahoo.com)
Aliakbar Vaisi Raygani (visi_akbar@yahoo.com)
Asghar Rostami (asghar6400@gmail.com)
Maryam Mirzaei (mirzaei.m.epid92@gmail.com)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer comments:
Reviewer 2: Thank you to the authors for improving the manuscript but it requires further adjustments before it is publishable.

The authors fail to grasp the difference between statistical and clinical significance and the implications of the small sample size of the study. A positive P value with a mean improvement of less than 5 degrees in dorsiflexion or plantar flexion is actually within measurement variation using a goniometer and does not confirm the results provide a clinical benefit as the study is presented. The authors must convince the reader that the results translate into improved functional outcomes for the patient or reduced pain during treatment, if the reader is to be convinced that they should change their behaviour and use TENS in the same way as suggested in this study. Please clarify that the independent assessor of the primary outcome travelled to all three sites and was not the person who applied the stretches.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

The P value for between groups difference was 0.001. Though it may be attributed to within measurement variation, it is not irrational to attribute it to real difference too.

“One independent assessor who was not the person who applied the stretches, travelled to all three sites and did all ankle measurements.” was added (Methods/Outcome measures/page 7).
-Reviewer 2:

The manuscript English has been improved but unfortunately, multiple errors of expression remain. Please have an independent colleague review the paper and ask them to assist with a detailed, fine-tooth assessment and upgrade minor issues throughout the manuscript.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

The manuscript was revised by an expert academic English Language editor.

-Reviewer 2:

Abstract
1. Conclusion - please adjust as the results do not confirm the statement as per comment above.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

A word “may” added. “Adding TENS to stretch may provide more improvement in ankle dorsiflexion and plantar flexion in prevention of ankle joint stiffness”.

-Reviewer 2:

Results
2. The added comment about the patient use of medication adds little value. Please provide more context about the types of drugs assessed and what the percentage relates to. Does this relate to the number of patients that took medications? The number of times patients took medications before intervention sessions or assessment points?

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

While respecting the valuable comments of the reviewer, explaining the type of drug used was not the aim of this study. So we think there is no need to go to the details. If the Dear reviewer and the Editor think it is better to go to the details, let us know.
3. The mean values of ankle ROM are presented, not the differences between the means, nor the differences between the means of the groups. Please adjust wording on pg

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

It was changed to:

“Mean values of dorsiflexion and plantar flexion during the study are shown in Figure 4–5.”

-Reviewer 2:

Results

4. Figures - these would be more interpretable if 95% CI error was provided with the line depicting the mean changes.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

We changed and corrected the figures based on reviewer's comments.

-Reviewer 2:

Discussion

5. The additions explaining the balance and neurological improvements due to TENS does not relate to the study outcomes.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

Because TENS improves strength, joint position sense and balance control, it is rational to conclude that TENS may improve joint mobility too. However, if the reviewer think it should be removed, we are ready to delete this sentence.

-Reviewer 2:

Discussion

6. Please remove the paragraph relating to the Somashekar et al paper. It does not add value or support study outcomes.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:
This paragraph was removed.

-Reviewer 2:

Conclusion

7. Needs consideration and adjustment after addressing issues above.

--Respond to specific reviewer comments:

A “May” was added: “Adding TENS to stretch may provide more improvement in ankle dorsiflexion and plantar flexion in prevention of ankle joint stiffness”.