Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 1 Date: 09 Jun 2019

Reviewer: Dale Edgar

Reviewer's report:

Manuscript Number: SSMR-D-19-00017R1

Title: Double-blind randomized clinical trial to investigate the efficacy of adding TENS to stretch for the improvement of ankle range of motion in inactive patients in intensive care units

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.

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.

Specific minor points to address:

Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion
7. Needs consideration and adjustment after addressing issues above.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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