

The rehabilitation definition for scientific research purposes by Cochrane Rehabilitation – first results

Negrini S (1,2), Meyer T (3), Stucki G (4, 5), Arienti C (6), Pollock A (7), Kiekens C (8,9) and the 3rd Cochrane Rehabilitation Methodology Meeting participants

1. Department of Biomedical, Surgical and Dental Sciences, University «La Statale», Milan (Italy)
2. Research Hospital (IRCCS) Orthopedic Institute Galeazzi, Milan (Italy)
3. School of Public Health, Bielefeld University
4. Department of Health Sciences and Medicine, University of Luzern (Switzerland)
5. Swiss Paraplegic Research, Nottwil (Switzerland)
6. Research Hospital (IRCCS) Fondazione Don Gnocchi, Milan, Italy
7. Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, United Kingdom
8. Spinal Unit, Montecatone Rehabilitation Institute, Imola (Italy)
9. Department of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine, University Hospitals Leuven, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Abstract

Background. Since its launch in 2016, Cochrane Rehabilitation (CR) has increasingly found the need to better define what rehabilitation is and what is not. We found that currently available definitions of rehabilitation fall short with regard to defining exactly what is needed for research purposes, specifically inclusion and exclusion criteria on an operational level.

Objectives. The aim was to specify a definition of rehabilitation suitable for research purposes that also defines inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Methods. The methodology was developed based on discussions during the CR Executive and Methodology Committees Meetings and with the Advisory Board of CR, which includes all relevant rehabilitation stakeholders, during its meeting in Kobe in June 2019. The methodology was then refined to include: (1) a survey involving a) the Advisory and b) the Executive Committee members and c) the participants invited to the consensus meeting here reported to collect the current definitions promoted by CR stakeholders, (2) a consensus meeting (CM) held in Milan (Italy) in February 2020, and (3) a Delphi procedure to reach a final definition.

The CM was organized in three parts. Part 1: presentation and discussion of current definitions and related problems. Part 2: work in smaller groups to prepare a proposal of the new operational

definition of rehabilitation for research purposes. Part 3: discussion and voting procedures on the proposal to be submitted to the Delphi procedure. The first round of the Delphi procedure will be conducted among the Meeting participants and the second round among the CR Advisory Board members. The results of the two rounds will be reviewed and synthesized, and a third Delphi round will be held again among the participants to the Meeting.

Results. During the Meeting it was decided that the proposed definition should contain all the essential key words that constitute the inclusion and exclusion criteria for research purposes, following the PICO (Population, Intervention, Control, Outcome) model as much as possible.

The current definition to be proposed for the Delphi Rounds is: *In a health care context rehabilitation is: “a multimodal person-centered process, including functioning interventions targeting (1) body functions, and/or (2) activities and participation, and/or (3) the interaction with the environment” (Intervention), with the goal of “optimizing functioning” (Outcome) for “(1) persons with health conditions (a) experiencing disability or (b) likely to experience disability and/or (2) persons with disability” (Population).*

This definition is currently provisional, and it should not be used until the final results of the Delphi are published.

Conclusions. These results will inform all the future work of CR and could also serve the scientific rehabilitation community.

Patient or healthcare consumer involvement. Representative of healthcare consumers are present in the Advisory Board of CR and contributed at all stages of the project when the Advisory Board was involved.