



WEB OF SCIENCE

RESPIRATORY REHABILITATION IN COVID-19 PATIENTS

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has caused dramatic effects throughout the world. The disease can cause major alveolar damage resulting in hypoxemic acute respiratory failure requiring mechanical ventilation in a high proportion of cases. Respiratory rehabilitation is a supervised program that includes health education, exercise training and breathing techniques. It is one of the most effective management strategies to improve shortness of breath, health status and exercise tolerance of patients with lung diseases post-COVID-19. Shortness of breath (dyspnea) and fatigue are the symptoms that are most likely to persist for 2-3 months or longer after a COVID-19 infection. In addition to that, and depending on the severity of the infection, patients may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and reduced quality of life. Pulmonary rehabilitation focuses on relieving these symptoms or at least helping the patient to cope with them. The symptoms mentioned above can create a vicious cycle by which the patient cannot perform normal daily activities. This inactivity leads to deconditioning, allowing further worsening of the symptoms. Pulmonary rehabilitation helps the patient break this cycle by providing therapy in a monitored environment and geared toward the patient's specific needs. Physical exercises must be adapted to individual needs and limitations of patients; symptoms during physical exercise (such as dyspnea, desaturation, and fatigue) should be taken into consideration; high-intensity exercises are not recommended; patients should receive instruction regarding the physical, psycho-emotional, and nutritional aspects of each stage of rehabilitation; and preventive measures, such as use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, physical distancing, and personal protective equipment, are essential during the assessment and on-site monitoring of patients at risk of transmitting the virus or at risk of reinfection. Pulmonary rehabilitation is recommended mainly to improve the physical and functional capacity of COVID-19 survivors before and after hospital discharge.