Multiple sclerosis and aquatic therapy. A systematic review

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Introduction: Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, inflammatory, progressive, disabling autoimmune disease affecting the central nervous system. Symptoms and signs of MS vary widely and patients may lose their ability to walk. To date the benefits of aquatic therapy often used for rehabilitation in MS patients have not been reviewed.

Objective: To systematically review the current state of aquatic treatment for persons with MS (hydrotherapy, aquatic therapy, aquatic exercises, spa therapy) and to evaluate the scientific evidence supporting the benefits of this therapeutic option.

Methods: The databases PubMed, Scopus, WoS and PEDro were searched to identify relevant reports published from January 1, 2011 to April 30, 2016.

Results: Of 306 articles identified, only 10 fulfilled the inclusion criteria: 5 randomized controlled, 2 simple randomized quasi-experimental, 1 semi-experimental, 1 blind controlled pilot and 1 pilot. Information on study design, intervention type, water or pool temperature, treatment time and conclusions may be found in Table.

Conclusion: Irrespective of the quality of each study, they all concluded that MS patients receiving some form of aquatic therapy showed improvements in one or more symptoms or functions with beneficial impacts on quality of life. Evidence that aquatic treatment improves quality of life in affected patients was very good in two studies, good in four, fair in two and weak in two.

Keywords: Multiple sclerosis, hydrotherapy, Physical Exercise, Exercise therapy.

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