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# Assessing the Interest of Telerehabilitation for Post-Stroke Patients in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

**Topic:** Telerehabilitation

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## BACKGROUND

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), access to healthcare is particularly problematic for post-stroke people (psp). In 2013, according to the WHO, there were only 0.091 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants. Many patients lack rehabilitation or receive only short-term care.

Telerehabilitation offers an innovative solution for providing rehabilitation services remotely, using information and communication technologies. In the past five years, publications on telerehabilitation have proliferated, with promising results. Studies, mainly from industrialized countries, showed that this rehabilitation is as effective as conventional methods, significantly improving functional recovery. This technology could improve rehabilitation services for stroke patients in low-income countries.

Before implementing telerehabilitation in the DRC, it is crucial to identify the interest and accessibility of patients to this device, to determine whether this solution can be relevant for psp.

## METHODS

Surveys of patients selected by the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) Department of UNIKIN, based on this criteria:

- *Inclusion criteria:* Psp in DR Congo; followed up in a PMR and/or Neurology department; presenting a permanent functional disability.
- *Exclusion criteria:* Neurocognitive disorders limiting comprehension of the questionnaire.

## RESULTS

Out of a total of 38 samples, the average age of participants was 54.1y.o., with a distribution of 36.8% women and 63.2% men. The Rankin score's median is 3 with a range of 3. Psp reported an average travel time of 2 hours and 11 minutes to access rehabilitation sessions, representing an obstacle for 86.8% of patients. Concerning the use of communication devices, 97.1% and 85.7% used smartphone or internet at least once a week, respectively, while 57.1%, 28.6% and 14.3% had respectively access to emails, computers and tablets at the same frequency.

In addition, 94.6% of patients are interested in receiving personalized follow-up if they had a rehabilitation via smartphone. Moreover, a high and similar number of psp (97.4%) reported that their interest in performing rehabilitation would be increased if they could be included in self-rehabilitation programs without time constraints and in conventional rehabilitation. On the other hand, only 5.3% were interested in receiving a personalized exercise program via an app, and filling in a virtual training log.

## CONCLUSION

Most participants owned a smartphone and would be interested in using it as means of communication for their rehabilitation. Travel is a major obstacle to have access to in-person therapy. The feasibility of telerehabilitation should be investigated in further studies. There is room to develop such services in low-income countries.

**Statement of Disclosures**

None

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