

O10

A novel robot-assisted upper-limb rehabilitation program in acute management of post-stroke patients: a randomized controlled trial

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Background: Aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a rehabilitation protocol consisting in a mix of robotic (by *NeReBot*) and non-robotic techniques.

Methods: Twenty-one subjects within 3 weeks after stroke were randomized in the experimental group (EG; n=11) and control group (CG; n=10). Both received 120 minutes/day treatment for five days a week for five weeks. Daily treatment in EG included traditional rehabilitation therapy (~65%) and robotic therapy (~35%, 20 minutes, twice a day) consisting of peripheral manipulation of the shoulder and elbow of the impaired limb, correlated with visual stimuli. The CG received only traditional rehabilitation treatment. The motor and functional outcome measured at the end of treatment, 3 and 7 months follow-up included: (1) the Medical Research Council Scale to assess the upper limb muscles; 2) the shoulder/elbow, coordination and wrist/hand subsections of the Fugl-Meyer Assessment; 3) the Motor-Functional Independent Measure; 4) the Box and Block test).

Results: The 2 groups were matched for demographic and clinical characteristics at baseline. Both groups showed motor and functional recovery of the upper limb at the end of treatment and after 3 and 7 months' follow-up. No significant differences were found between CG and EG.

Conclusion: A rehabilitation programme including *NeReBot* training in substitution of part of traditional therapy, seems to lead to an improvement in the impaired upper limb, similarly to traditional rehabilitation treatment, and persists at follow-up.

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O11

Loss of Independent joint control in acute stroke quantified by the ACT3D system

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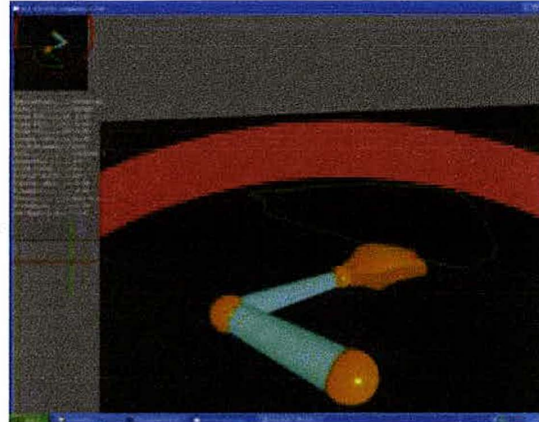
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Introduction: One of the mechanisms known to negatively influence functional movement after stroke is abnormal muscle co-activation patterns, such as between shoulder abductors and elbow/wrist/finger flexors. This loss of Independent joint control, measured by work area as a function of abduction loading, is strongly correlated with performance of ADL. The objective of this ongoing study is to identify the emergence and progression of the loss of independent joint control in individuals with sub-acute stroke.

Methods: To date, 11 individuals with sub-acute stroke have participated. Individuals were included if they could elevate the arm to 90° against gravity (100% limb weight). Robotic evaluations of horizontal plane reaching workspace (figure) as a function of shoulder abduction loading (0%-200% of limb weight) were performed weekly for 12 weeks followed by monthly for 3 months.



Results: There was an immediate presence of loss of independent joint control after stroke measured as a rapid reduction in work area as a function of limb loading as early as 3 weeks post-stroke. All participants showed an exponential rate of recovery over time.

Conclusions: Rapid recovery suggests this cohort represents mildly impairment individuals. The emergence of loss of independent joint control immediately after stroke suggests an immediate plastic response of the central nervous system. Quantification of work area represents a powerful evaluation of upper extremity movement and demonstrates the necessity of immediately targeting the underlying impairment. Ongoing research is attempting to better understand the persistence of loss of Independent joint control in sub-acute individuals with severe stroke.

O12

Stimulation of the proprioceptive system in neurorehabilitation

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Objectives: The aim of the study was to investigate the human proprioceptive system in healthy subjects and in patients with severe brain damage and to develop a paradigm for the brain mapping of proprioceptive foot stimulation with vibration.

Participants, Materials/Methods: 15 healthy male subjects and 22 patients were stimulated with a vibrotactile stimulus on the right foot by a moving magnet actuator system and at the first and second toe with a cuff-type pneumatic stimulator.

Results: Brain activity within the main centers of the primary and secondary sensorimotor cortex, within the pre- and postcentral gyrus bilaterally and the right inferior, medial and middle frontal gyrus, within the inferior parietal lobule, the superior temporal gyrus, the temporal transverse gyrus, the caudate nucleus, the middle cingulate gyrus, the insula and the hippocampus on the left side. Only in 7 out of 22 patients a specific response within the primary and secondary sensorimotor cortex could be elicited.

Conclusions: It could be shown that vibrotactile stimulation of the foot in healthy subjects can elicit specific brain responses in main centers of the sensorimotor system and in centers of attention and arousal. It was possible to map in detail the cortical representation of the proprioceptive system of the foot for a functional diagnosis

and a monitoring of the proprioceptive system in neurorehabilitation, e.g. in subjects with degradation of the proprioceptive system (space disease, bedrest syndrome) and in patients with severe brain damage for the planning of specific rehabilitation strategies and the induction of arousal.

O13

Impairment of the rightsided homologous broca-area by repetitive transcranial magnet stimulation (rTMS) in patients with aphasia due to leftsided brain infarct leads to improvement of regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) and speech performance

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Introduction: In leftsided cerebral ischemia reversal of aphasia partially depends on activation of the rightsided homologous Broca-Area. Reactivation of the leftsided Broca area is best for rehabilitation. Impairment of the right Brodman area 44 prior to speech therapy by rTMS might lead to forced activation of the leftsided Broca area.

Study aim: Do patients with leftsided brain infarct and aphasia benefit from repetitive impairment of the homologous Broca area by rTMS prior to speech therapy? Is this reflected by alteration in rCBF?

Patients und Protocol: Righthanded aphasic patients were treated with daily speech therapy. Over 2 weeks rTMS (1Hz, 20 min) led to transient impairment of the rightsided area 44. This homologous Broca area was identified using MRI. rCBF during speech production was measured with PET prior to begin and at the end of the 2 weeks protocol. The double blind randomized protocol included sham treated patients (rTMS over the vertex). Outcome parameters for speech performance were Aachener Aphasia-Test (AAT), Amsterdam-Nijmegen Everyday Language Test, Regensburger word fluidity-test, and naming test.

Results: Patients treated with rTMS over the right homologous Broca area experienced a better speech improvement than the sham group. rCBF shifted from the right to the left Broca area only in verum and not in sham treated patients indicating a reinstallation of functional capacity of the Broca area.

Summary: Patients with aphasia benefit from a daily rTMS treatment of the right homologous Broca area plus speech therapy. This is reflected by improvement of rCBF in the true Broca area.

O14

Post-stroke fMRI, a comparison of BOLD, cerebral blood flow, and cerebral blood volume responses

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Introduction: Blood oxygenation level-dependent (BOLD) fMRI is a neuroimaging approach that is influenced by multiple hemodynamic parameters, and has shown inconsistent prognostic capabilities in patients with cerebrovascular disease. New, noninvasive fMRI techniques have emerged with specific sensitivity to cerebral blood flow (CBF) and blood volume (CBV). We aim to determine whether these techniques can provide more precise contrast indicative of impairment in post-ischemic stroke patients than BOLD fMRI alone.

Methods: Post-stroke patients (n=11) and age-matched healthy volunteers (n=11) were scanned (3T) using T1-weighted structural imaging, BOLD-fMRI, 3D CBF-weighted (CBFw) arterial spin labeling (ASL), and 3D CBV-weighted (CBVw) vascular-space-occupancy (VASO). All subjects performed four blocks of 60s/30s rest/1Hz-wrist-extension/flexion using a custom-built joystick. Primary motor cortex in the hemisphere contralateral to the moved hand (affected hand for patients) was used as the region of interest(ROI). Within this ROI the BOLD, CBFw and CBVw reactivity was separately calculated for healthy subjects and patients.

Results and Discussion: Significant changes ($\Delta S \pm \text{std}$) in fractional BOLD ($\Delta S = 0.33 \pm 0.15$, $p < 0.0001$), CBFw-ASL ($\Delta S = 17.7 \pm 4.3\%$, $p < 0.0001$) and CBVw-VASO ($\Delta SI = 1.42 \pm 0.28\%$, $p < 0.0001$) were found in healthy subjects, within the normal range of neurovascular coupling. In patients no significant change in BOLD was found ($p > 0.05$), despite significant increases in fractional CBF ($\Delta S = 15.4 \pm 6.74\%$, $p = 0.0003$) and CBV ($\Delta SI = 0.80 \pm 0.48\%$, $p = 0.001$). Our results suggest that impaired cerebrovascular reserve capacity among stroke patients may have influenced the BOLD response, which is a phenomenon that has been described to a limited extent in the literature. CBFw-ASL and CBVw-VASO may therefore potentially be superior to BOLD when investigating post-stroke plasticity and recovery.

O15

Plasticity and response to action observation: A longitudinal fMRI study in patients with subcortical stroke

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Background: Action observation has been suggested as an approach to retraining motor function in patients post stroke. To understand brain plasticity, a new action observation fMRI task is proposed and applied in subacute stroke patients with reduced arm movement ability.

Methods: From an ongoing study, six patients (65±10.7 years) with infarctions in either the pons or internal capsule were scanned twice; 1-2 and 12 weeks post stroke (3T, GE, US). The task-dependent fMRI acquisitions included coordinated bimanual movements (twisting a cylindrical device) and action observation (watching a video showing in alternating sequences either the same movements or a still image of a person performing the same task). fMRI activation maps (threshold $p < 0.005$, SPM8, UK) from patients and 11 controls (61.5±6.1 years) were analyzed.

Results: During action observation, the peripheral occipital lobe including the dorsal stream of visual cortex extending towards parietal areas was activated in all participants. In controls, premotor and Broca's areas were observed. In patients 1-2 weeks post stroke, activations were reduced to fewer clusters with less frontal involvement. After 12 weeks, the spatial extent of activation was again significantly larger, particularly in parietal areas. At this stage also putamen (regulating movement) and the posterior lobe of the cerebellum (fine motor coordination) were involved, and most patients had regained full movement ability.

Conclusions: During the first three months post stroke an approximation towards normal activation patterns was seen, in accordance with clinical recovery. The proposed action observation task holds potential to identify plasticity changes in these patients.

- Acler M. O01
 Adeyemo B. O08, P086
 Agersnap L. P001
 Agosti M. P013
 Agostini M. DP03, P015
 Aiachini A. P108
 Akhmadeeva L. O22
 Aksu Yildirim S. P089
 Alessandrini F. O01
 Alfonsi E. O23
 Allena M. O23
 Amadio A. P046
 Andreu L.I. P033
 Angeleri R. P062, P083, P084
 Angleitner C. P094
 Armakola F. P026
 Armani M. O10
 Arnaldi D. P055
 Avesani R. O05
 Baert E. P111
 Baeyens J.P. P019, DP14
 Bakas E. P026, P027
 Bakran Ž. O20
 Balconi M. P036, P040, P054
 Baldessarelli S. DP02
 Bamborschke S. P067
 Bara B. P062, P083, P084
 Barassi G. P020
 Bardeleben A. P096
 Baricich A. DP12
 Baronti F. DP08
 Barosio E.C. P106
 Barra J. P053
 Barrio M. P072
 Barth M. DP13
 Bartko D. P002, P092, P093
 Basciani M. P105
 Bassolino M. O17
 Basteris A. DP15
 Bauer G. P058
 Bauer P. DP10
 Becker F. O25
 Beckwée D. P019
 Beghi E. P070
 Beghi M. O27, P042, P070
 Behrend S. P100
 Behrens J. P080
 Bellanti A. P078
 Bellomo R.G. P020
 Beltramello A. O01
 Benito J. P072
 Bentz M. P048
 Beom J. P077
 Bergmann J. DP11
 Bernardini B. P085
 Bertolino C. P078
 Best C. O06
 Bigozzi E. P037
 Binder H. P088, P093
 Binkofski F. O02
 Bittner V. P109
 Bizzarini E. O04
 Blarr S. P068
 Blasa G. P046
 Blicher J. O14
 Boceva S. DP09
 Bohlhalter S. DP08
 Bohli D. O03
 Boixadós M. P033
 Boldrini P. O05
 Bonikowski M. P004
 Borg J. P101
 Bosco F.M. P062, P083, P084
 Bossi D. P106
 Bove M. O17
 Bovi P. O01
 Bovolenta F. P013
 Bramanti P. P110
 Brambilla G. O27, P042, P070
 Brendel C. DP05
 Bruetsch K. P006
 Brunner I. O15
 Brunner W. P099
 Brustenghi P. P098
 Brzozowska-Magoń A. P047
 Buschfort R. P011
 Butkoviæ Soldo S. O20
 Buurke J. O11, O26
 Caldiroli C. P054
 Caleri F. P056
 Cannillo F. P078, P098
 Cantagallo A. P037
 Carda S. DP12
 Carezza M. P038
 Carrozza M.C. P009
 Caruso S. P038
 Castrillo Amores M.A. DP18, P028, P030, P031, P073, P095, P103
 Cataldo S. P056
 Cavazza S. P013
 Cazzulani B. P112
 Cerina G. P085
 Cerri C.G. O27, P039, P086
 Chauvineau V. P053
 Chiasera A. O10
 Chittaro L. O04
 Chrispin A. P091
 Christova M. O12
 Chun M.H. DP01
 Cincotti F. O07
 Cisari C. DP12
 Cisotti C. O04
 Ciuffreda L. P106
 Clerici F. O24
 Clerici M. O27
 Clerici P. P013
 Clijsen R. DP14
 Cognolato G. DP12
 Colombo R. P108
 Colonova M. P063
 Combor I. P092, P093
 Corea F. P078, P098
 Cornaggia C.M. O27, P039, P042, P070
 Corradini C. DP02
 Corsini C. P085
 Crecchi R. P009
 Crivelli D. P036
 Crombez E. P111
 Crone J. P057
 Curt A. O03
 Czernuszenko A. P004
 Dahlan S. P050
 D'Aleo G. P110
 D'Amico M. P020
 Daminov V. P017, P024, P041, P045
 Daud O. P015
 De Maio G. O04
 De Niet M. P102
 De Tanti A. O05
 De Vico Fallani F. DP16, O07
 Del Percio C. P014
 Demeyer H. DP14
 den Boer J. P023
 Dennis J. O06
 Depa A. P047
 Dewald J. O11
 Di Rienzo F. P105
 Di Stefano A. P020
 Di Vita A. O21
 Dinacci D. O24
 Dinan-Young S. O06
 Dohle C. P080
 Donaghy M. O06
 Donahue M. O14
 Dossena F. O27
 Druzbecki M. P004, P047
 Dubroja I. O20
 Dudek J. P004
 Ellis M. O11
 Eng K. O03
 Engelmann N. O16
 Engl H.P. O18
 Enzo P. P014
 Erslund L. O15
 Estévez N. O03
 Ettlin T. P032
 Fadiga L. O17
 Fassio C. P112
 Fausch H. P032
 Fedeli M. P051
 Ferlini G. O10
 Ferrari C. P036, P040
 Ferraro C. O10
 Ferro S. O05
 Fheodoroff K. P087, P088
 Fiaschi A. O01, P037
 Filippi M. P009
 Fiore P. P105
 Fonte C. P037
 Formaggio E. O01
 Formisano R. O05
 Franceschini M. P013, P014
 Fraser H. O06
 Fregni F. O08
 Freimueller M. P069, P087
 Fröhlich S. P100
 Frost M. P071
 Gabbatore I. P084
 Gal R. P063
 Galati V. P020
 Gallasch E. O12
 Gandolfi M. P037
 Gebara B. DP14
 Gerstenbrand F. O12, P056, P057, P058
 Geurts A. P023, P102
 Ghirmai S. O085
 Giannoni P. DP15
 Gilardone M. P079
 Ginex V. O24
 Gioacchino A. P097
 Giovanazzi E. P106
 Golaszewski S. O12, P056, P057, P058
 Golmayer P. P094
 Gombosova Z. P092, P093
 Grüner R. O15
 Guariglia C. O21, P034
 Gueye T. P061
 Guillebastre B. P091
 Gunther L. O25
 Hallaert G. P111
 Hallett M. DP08
 Hameed F. P086
 Han T.R. P077
 Hanna S. DP05, O16
 Harnie L. O28
 Harnier S. P071
 Hartmann A.E.L. O13, P064, P065, P068, P071
 Hartwig M. P010
 Haslwanter T. P107
 Hatta Y. P049
 Hauchecorne I. DP14
 Heise P. P094
 Heiß W.D. O13
 Hepp-Reymond M.C. O03
 Herzog J. P074
 Hess A. P011
 Hesse S. DP02, O09, P011, P016, P018, P096, P100
 Higuchi T. P052
 Hiyamizu M. P049
 Hochgruber V. P018
 Hotz-Boendermaker S. O03
 Hugdahl K. O15
 Hummelsheim H. DP05, O16
 Hvistendahl A.K. O25
 Ianieri G. P104
 Iardello L. P078
 Ikeoka M. P082
 Ilsbrouckx S. DP14
 Imanaka K. P052
 Infarinato F. P014
 Intiso D. P105
 Invernizzi M. DP12
 Jahn K. DP11
 Jain N. P086
 Jania J. P064
 Jannink M. DP06
 Jezzard P. O14
 Johansen-Berg H. O14
 Jureczko P. P003, P021
 Jzerman M.I. DP06
 Kaiser V. DP16
 Kaplas A. P027
 Karl R. DP07
 Kawasaki T. P052
 Keller I. P035
 Kerckhofs E. DP14, O28, P019, P043
 Kessler P. O13
 Khansefid M. O05
 Kiechl R. P107
 Kilga C. P075
 Kilinc M. P089
 Kim H.J. DP01
 Kim H.M. DP01
 Kim S.B. DP01
 Kim W.J. P090
 Kiper D. O03
 Kirmess M. O25
 Kitisomprayoonkul W. P050
 Klobucka S. P002, P005
 Kneissl J. P074
 Koenig E. DP10, DP11, P059
 Kofler M. DP13, O18, P075, P107, P110
 Kollias S. O03
 Kollreider A. P010
 Konradi J. P066, P076
 Kossmehl P. DP07
 Kotchoubey B. DP17
 Kotroni A. P027
 Kottink A. O11, O26
 Kováè M. P005
 Krabben T. O26
 Kraft E. P059
 Krewer C. DP10, DP11
 Kronbichler M. P057
 Kuhle N. DP07
 Kulikova I. P041
 Kumru H. P072
 Kumthornthip W. P090
 Kunz A.B. O12, P056, P057, P058
 Kuznetcov A. P045, P024, P041
 Kwolek A. P047
 Lafosse C. P043
 Lang S. DP17
 Lauri M. P022

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