

Do evidence-based practice guidelines exist to support physiotherapists in the approach of patients with episodic headache?

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Background

The International Classification of Headache Disorders provides an extensive framework to classify headaches as primary or secondary. Physiotherapy is indicated if neuro-musculoskeletal dysfunctions are assumed to be related to the pathophysiological process. Mostly patients suffering from episodic migraine, cervicogenic and tension-type headache consult physiotherapists. Various interventions such as manual therapy, relaxation and exercise therapy are applied in such patients. Yet, clinical outcomes following physiotherapy tend to vary.

Problem statement

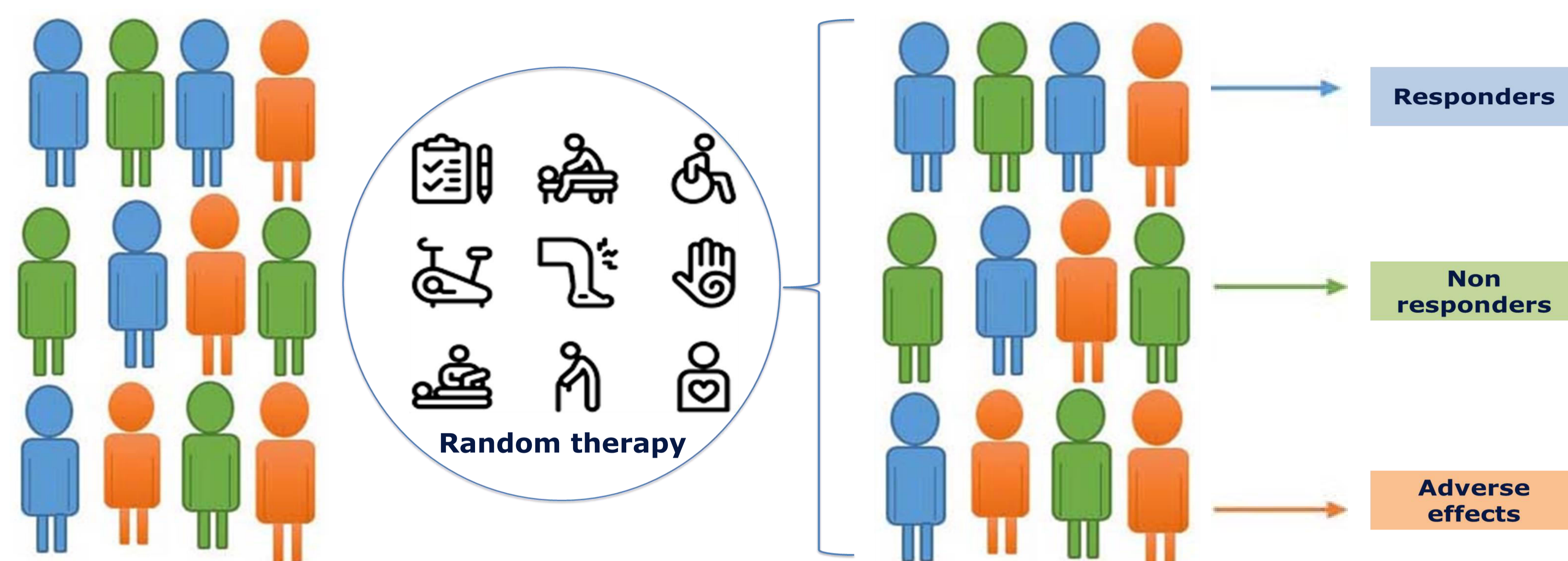


Figure 1. Visualisation of the consequence of random physiotherapeutic interventions in patients with headache

Methods

National and international physiotherapy guidelines concerning the treatment of headache were searched in the databases Pubmed, Web of Science, Pedro and the Cochrane library from January to May 2017. The following Topics or Medical subject heading terms were combined: 'Headache', 'Adult', 'Physiotherapy or Physical Therapy', '(EBM/EBP)Guidelines' and 'Recommendations'. Guidelines as well as meta-analyses and (systematic) reviews in English and Dutch were included.

Results

Guidelines focus primarily on the pharmacological management of headache. From only two evidence-based physiotherapy guidelines it was concluded that effectiveness of interventions will depend on clinical reasoning since not all interventions are equally effective for all headache types.

Pitfalls in scientific headache-research

- No systematic approach
- Heterogeneous therapy approach
- Lack of robust scientific evidence for the efficacy of physiotherapy techniques
- Widespread use of physiotherapeutic interventions
- Overuse of diagnostic imaging (MRI, CT, radiology)
- Pre-defined focus on specific interventions
- Physiotherapy intervention of choice is determined based on diagnosis instead of clinical findings



Recommendations in scientific headache-research

- Multi-disciplinary approach
- Identify the headache trigger(s)
- Patient education
- Add home-based interventions
- Individualize therapy
- Stimulate active patient participation and self-efficacy
- Question lifestyle and psychosocial factors
- Stratify patients
- Set realistic goals



Approach

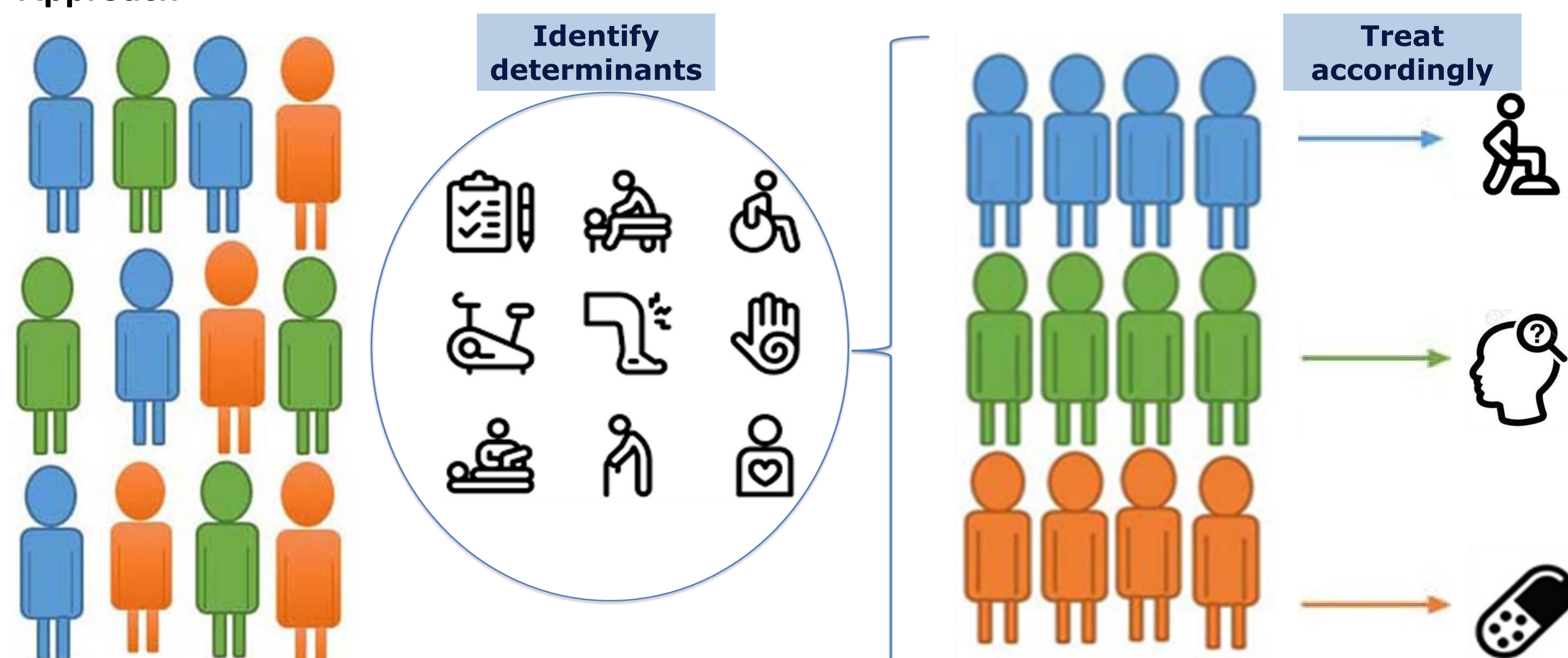


Figure 2. Visualisation of determinant-based physiotherapeutic interventions in patients with headache

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