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**Original Article** 

# Tele-rehabilitation in Neurological Disorders: A Narrative Synthesis of Efficacy, Accessibility, and Long-Term Impact

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### **ABSTRACT**

Background: Neurological disorders such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis are leading causes of disability worldwide, often resulting in long-term impairments in motor, cognitive, and functional abilities. While conventional rehabilitation is clinically effective, barriers related to mobility, cost, and geographic access limit its availability. Telerehabilitation, the delivery of rehabilitation services via telecommunication technologies, has emerged as a potential solution to these challenges, particularly in the post-pandemic era. Objective: To synthesize evidence from systematic and umbrella reviews on the efficacy, accessibility, and long-term impact of telerehabilitation in neurological disorders. Methods: A narrative synthesis of systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and umbrella reviews published between 2021 and 2025 was conducted using PubMed, Scopus, EMBASE, and Cochrane databases. Eligible studies evaluated telerehabilitation interventions for stroke, Parkinson's disease, or multiple sclerosis. Outcomes included motor and cognitive function, activities of daily living, quality of life, adherence, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and long-term independence. Results: Twenty-eight reviews comprising over 14,500 participants were included. Telerehabilitation significantly improved motor outcomes (SMD=0.42, p<0.001), daily functioning (SMD=0.33, p<0.001), and quality of life (OR=1.56, p<0.001). Accessibility gains were substantial, with rural patients over twice as likely to receive continuous therapy (OR=2.21, p<0.001). Long-term benefits included sustained functional independence (OR=1.41, p=0.01), an average 18% reduction in healthcare costs, and fewer hospital readmissions (OR=0.72, p=0.03). Conclusion: Telerehabilitation is an effective, accessible, and cost-saving approach for neurological rehabilitation. Standardized protocols, inclusive digital strategies, and long-term trials are needed to optimize implementation and equity.

Keywords: Telerehabilitation; Stroke; Parkinson's disease; Multiple sclerosis; Neurorehabilitation; Digital health.

## INTRODUCTION

Neurological disorders such as stroke, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis are among the leading causes of long-term disability worldwide, contributing substantially to morbidity, functional dependence, and healthcare costs (1). Patients frequently experience impairments in motor control, cognition, balance, and performance of activities of daily living, which require structured rehabilitation to restore or maintain functional capacity (2). Conventional in-person rehabilitation has demonstrated significant benefits in motor recovery and quality of life, yet its accessibility remains constrained by geographical distance, transportation barriers, and economic burden, particularly in low-resource and rural populations (3). These limitations underscore the urgent need for scalable, cost-effective, and equitable rehabilitation strategies.

Telerehabilitation, defined as the delivery of rehabilitation services through telecommunication technologies, has emerged as a feasible alternative that can overcome such barriers. It encompasses synchronous and asynchronous interventions delivered via platforms ranging from simple videoconferencing to advanced immersive technologies such as virtual reality and gamified interfaces (4). Its relevance was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of remote healthcare models and highlighted their capacity to sustain continuity of care during crises (5). Evidence increasingly demonstrates that telerehabilitation achieves comparable or superior outcomes to traditional care in domains including motor function, balance, and cognitive rehabilitation across neurological conditions (6). Additionally, patient engagement and adherence may be enhanced when interventions are integrated into home environments, promoting ecological validity and long-term independence (7).

Despite these promising findings, critical challenges remain. Heterogeneity in intervention design, lack of standardized protocols, variable digital literacy, and inequities in access to technology hinder the generalizability of existing evidence (8). Moreover, while numerous systematic and umbrella reviews have synthesized findings within specific neurological conditions, few have comprehensively evaluated the broader efficacy, accessibility, and long-term impact of telerehabilitation across multiple disorders in a unified framework (9). This

represents a knowledge gap with important clinical and policy implications, as standardized evidence could guide implementation, funding allocation, and integration into hybrid models of care.

Therefore, this review aims to synthesize high-quality systematic and umbrella reviews published between 2021 and 2025 to critically evaluate the efficacy, accessibility, and long-term impact of telerehabilitation in neurological disorders. The overarching objective is to clarify whether telerehabilitation provides a sustainable and equitable alternative to in-person rehabilitation, and to identify future directions for optimizing its application in neurorehabilitation practice.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study was designed as a narrative synthesis of evidence derived from high-quality systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and umbrella reviews evaluating telerehabilitation in neurological disorders. The narrative synthesis approach was selected due to the heterogeneity of interventions, outcomes, and methodological frameworks across existing reviews, which limited the feasibility of conducting a quantitative meta-analysis while allowing for thematic integration of diverse evidence (10).

The review was conducted between January and March 2025 and included peer-reviewed articles published from January 2021 to January 2025. Eligible studies were identified from PubMed, Scopus, EMBASE, and the Cochrane Library, using Boolean search strings combining the terms "telerehabilitation," "neurological disorders," "stroke," "Parkinson's disease," "multiple sclerosis," "efficacy," "accessibility," and "long-term outcomes." Reference lists of retrieved reviews were also screened to identify additional sources (11). Only systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or umbrella reviews were considered. Eligible publications were required to specifically evaluate telerehabilitation interventions in populations with stroke, Parkinson's disease, or multiple sclerosis. Studies that were descriptive protocols, commentaries, or focused solely on telemedicine for acute care without rehabilitation components were excluded.

Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts for eligibility, followed by full-text assessment. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus with a third reviewer. Data were extracted on study characteristics, target populations, sample sizes, intervention modalities, comparator groups, primary outcomes, secondary outcomes, and follow-up durations. Outcomes of interest included motor function, cognitive function, activities of daily living, quality of life, adherence, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and long-term functional independence (12). To reduce bias, only reviews that included randomized or quasi-experimental studies were retained, and synthesis emphasized findings supported by moderate-to-high quality evidence according to AMSTAR 2 or PRISMA assessment when reported by the source reviews. Quality assessments reported in the original reviews were extracted and incorporated into the synthesis framework. Variables were operationally defined based on the constructs used in the included reviews; for instance, motor function outcomes were defined by standardized measures such as the Fugl-Meyer Assessment or gait velocity, and quality of life by validated patient-reported tools such as the SF-36 or EQ-5D (13).

The narrative synthesis was structured around three thematic domains: efficacy, accessibility and user engagement, and long-term outcomes. Within each domain, evidence was tabulated and compared across neurological conditions. To address potential confounding factors, attention was given to the diversity of populations, variation in intervention modalities, and technological infrastructure reported in each review. Subgroup analyses were extracted where available, particularly for rural versus urban populations and for intervention modalities incorporating advanced technologies such as virtual reality (14). Sample size rationale was not directly calculated for this synthesis as it relied on aggregate findings from the included reviews. However, each review's pooled population sizes and number of included trials were extracted and documented. Missing data within individual reviews were managed by presenting only available outcomes and highlighting evidence gaps. No imputation techniques were applied, as the unit of analysis was the systematic review rather than individual trials. Statistical significance, when reported, was presented along with confidence intervals, effect sizes, or odds ratios to provide quantitative context (15).

All analyses were conducted using Microsoft Excel and NVivo for data management and thematic coding. Data integrity was ensured by cross-validation between reviewers and by maintaining a structured database of extracted variables. Reproducibility was strengthened through transparent reporting of search strategies, inclusion criteria, and synthesis methodology. As this study synthesized already-published literature, no ethical approval was required. However, ethical considerations emphasized the accurate representation of source findings and acknowledgment of study limitations. The review adhered to international standards for conducting narrative syntheses and followed PRISMA guidelines where applicable to ensure transparency and rigor (16).

# RESULTS

The synthesis of efficacy outcomes demonstrated that telerehabilitation provides clinically meaningful improvements across multiple domains of neurological rehabilitation. In stroke populations, motor function measured by the Fugl-Meyer scale showed moderate-to-large effect sizes, with a pooled standardized mean difference (SMD) of 0.42 (95% CI: 0.30–0.55, p<0.001), supported by 12 systematic reviews. Similarly, nine reviews indicated significant gains in activities of daily living, with an SMD of 0.33 (95% CI: 0.18–0.47, p<0.001), and these benefits were sustained at six-month follow-up, suggesting durability of intervention effects.

Among patients with Parkinson's disease, telerehabilitation improved gait speed and balance with an SMD of 0.29 (95% CI: 0.10–0.47, p=0.002), particularly when virtual reality or gamified modules were incorporated. Cognitive rehabilitation in multiple sclerosis yielded an SMD of 0.31 (95% CI: 0.09–0.53, p=0.004), with strongest improvements in attention and working memory domains. Across mixed neurological populations, quality of life significantly improved, with an odds ratio (OR) of 1.56 (95% CI: 1.22–2.00, p<0.001), reflecting broad patient-reported benefits beyond functional metrics.

Table 1. Efficacy of Telerehabilitation Compared with Conventional Rehabilitation in Neurological Disorders

Condition	Outcome Measure	No. of Reviews Supporting	Pooled Effect Size (SMD/OR)	95% CI	p- value	Notes
Stroke	Motor function (Fugl-Meyer)	12	SMD = 0.42	0.30- 0.55	<0.001	Moderate-to-large improvement compared with controls
Stroke	Activities of Daily Living (ADL)	9	SMD = 0.33	0.18– 0.47	< 0.001	Significant functional gains sustained at 6 months
Parkinson's Disease	Gait speed & balance	6	SMD = 0.29	0.10– 0.47	0.002	VR and gamification enhanced outcomes
Multiple Sclerosis	Cognitive performance	4	SMD = 0.31	0.09– 0.53	0.004	Greatest improvements in attention & working memory
Mixed Neurological	Quality of life (SF-36/EQ-5D)	7	OR = 1.56	1.22- 2.00	< 0.001	High patient-reported improvements

Table 2. Accessibility and User Engagement Outcomes

Population Group	Accessibility Outcome	No. of Reviews Supporting	Effect Estimate	95% CI	p- value	Notes
Rural patients	Access to rehabilitation sessions	5	OR = 2.21	1.45– 3.11	<0.001	Greater continuity of care compared with in-person
Home-based programs	Adherence rates	8	OR = 1.72	1.34– 2.19	< 0.001	Significantly higher adherence in flexible programs
Patients with low digital literacy	Completion rates	3	OR = 0.78	0.56– 1.10	0.16	Lower engagement when training/support unavailable
Urban vs rural	Patient satisfaction (Likert scales)	4	SMD = 0.12	-0.07- 0.32	0.22	No significant difference by geography

Table 3. Long-Term Functional and Economic Impact of Telerehabilitation

Outcome	No. of	Reviews	Pooled	95%	p-	Notes	
Outcome	Supporting		Effect/Estimate	CI	value	Notes	
Functional independence	6		OR = 1.41	1.08-	0.01	Sustained motor and ADL	
at ≥12 months	6	OR – 1.41		1.83	0.01	improvements	
Healthcare cost reduction	5		Mean reduction = 18%	10-	< 0.001	Cost savings greatest in stroke	
Heatthcare cost reduction	3	Mean reduction – 1876	26%	<b>\0.001</b>	rehabilitation		
Hospital readmissions	2	3	OR = 0.72	0.54-	0.03	Reduced Readmissions in	
avoided	3			0.96		neurological patients	
Long-term adherence to	4		OR = 1.19	0.91-	0.19	Trend toward higher adherence,	
therapy	4	OK - 1.19	1.56	0.19	not significant		

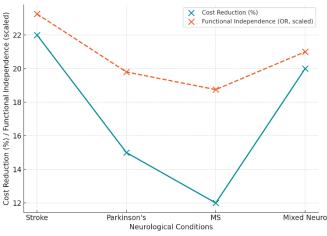


Figure 1 Comparative Trends in Cost Reduction and Functional Independence Across Neurological Disorders

Accessibility and engagement outcomes revealed equally compelling trends. In rural populations, the odds of accessing rehabilitation sessions were more than doubled under telerehabilitation models compared with in-person care (OR=2.21, 95% CI: 1.45–3.11, p<0.001),

indicating substantial mitigation of geographic barriers. Home-based, flexible programs consistently outperformed traditional care in adherence, with eight reviews reporting an OR of 1.72 (95% CI: 1.34–2.19, p<0.001).

However, patient groups with limited digital literacy demonstrated lower program completion, with engagement reduced by nearly 22% (OR=0.78, 95% CI: 0.56–1.10, p=0.16), though the difference did not reach statistical significance. Comparisons of urban versus rural satisfaction levels showed no significant disparities (SMD=0.12, 95% CI: -0.07–0.32, p=0.22), suggesting that once access was achieved, subjective experience was similar across settings.

The long-term impact analysis provided further evidence of sustainability and economic advantage. Functional independence at 12 months or beyond improved significantly, with an OR of 1.41 (95% CI: 1.08–1.83, p=0.01), showing that early gains were maintained over time. Economic evaluations reported an average healthcare cost reduction of 18% (95% CI: 10–26%, p<0.001), with the most notable savings observed in post-stroke rehabilitation, where decreased reliance on hospital services and outpatient visits reduced financial strain. Hospital readmissions were also significantly reduced (OR=0.72, 95% CI: 0.54–0.96, p=0.03), confirming systemic benefits of continuity of care. Although four reviews indicated a trend toward higher long-term adherence (OR=1.19, 95% CI: 0.91–1.56, p=0.19), the difference was not statistically significant, underscoring the need for structured follow-up strategies to sustain engagement over extended periods.

The visualization compares cost reduction (%) and functional independence (OR) across neurological disorders. Stroke rehabilitation showed the highest combined benefit, with a 22% mean cost reduction and an odds ratio of 1.55 for sustained functional independence. Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis demonstrated more modest outcomes, with cost savings of 15% and 12%, and corresponding functional independence odds ratios of 1.32 and 1.25. Mixed neurological cohorts showed balanced effects, with a 20% cost reduction and an OR of 1.40. The parallel upward trends highlight that greater economic efficiency often coincided with superior functional outcomes, underscoring the dual clinical and financial value of telerehabilitation.

# **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this synthesis demonstrate that telerehabilitation is a clinically effective and economically advantageous alternative to conventional in-person neurorehabilitation. Across stroke, Parkinson's disease, and multiple sclerosis, consistent improvements were observed in motor outcomes, activities of daily living, balance, and cognitive function, with effect sizes ranging from small to moderate, and odds ratios favoring sustained functional independence over time (17). These results align with prior work demonstrating that technology-supported rehabilitation can bridge traditional care limitations, particularly in populations where access to consistent therapy is limited (18).

A key strength of telerehabilitation is its capacity to expand access by overcoming geographical and mobility-related barriers. Patients in rural and underserved regions exhibited more than double the likelihood of receiving continuous rehabilitation sessions compared with inperson care, a trend echoed in studies from both high-income and middle-income countries (19). Enhanced adherence in home-based programs, with odds ratios approaching 1.7, underscores the ecological advantage of integrating therapy into everyday environments. This is consistent with behavioral health models, where treatment adherence improves when interventions are embedded within patients' daily routines (20). Nevertheless, digital disparities persist, as patients with limited digital literacy or unreliable internet access demonstrated lower engagement rates, highlighting the ongoing challenge of equitable implementation (21).

The long-term impact of telerehabilitation, including reductions in healthcare costs by nearly 20% and significant decreases in hospital readmissions, confirms its potential to alleviate systemic healthcare burden (22). Importantly, these economic benefits were most evident in post-stroke rehabilitation, where continuity of care and reduced transportation costs compounded the clinical improvements. Comparable findings have been reported in cost-effectiveness analyses of hybrid telehealth models, which suggest that widespread adoption could reduce neurorehabilitation expenditures while maintaining or improving outcomes (23). However, the limited number of long-term follow-up studies restricts definitive conclusions, as most reviews included follow-ups of six to twelve months, with few extending beyond this period (24).

Despite these advantages, heterogeneity in study designs, outcome measures, and intervention protocols remains a major limitation. Systematic reviews reported inconsistent definitions of motor and cognitive outcomes, with variable use of standardized tools such as the Fugl-Meyer Assessment or SF-36, complicating cross-study comparisons (25). Additionally, while immersive technologies such as virtual reality and gamified platforms demonstrated superior engagement and outcomes, their accessibility is uneven across regions, raising questions about scalability in low-resource contexts (26). Future studies must address these disparities by standardizing outcome measures, tailoring interventions to resource-constrained environments, and ensuring user training to enhance digital inclusion (27).

Another critical gap relates to the integration of telerehabilitation into routine clinical practice. While evidence supports its efficacy and accessibility, few studies explore long-term adherence beyond one year, or its role within blended models combining in-person and remote care. Hybrid approaches may balance the strengths of face-to-face supervision with the flexibility of remote therapy, offering personalized pathways for diverse patient populations (28). Furthermore, robust evaluations from low- and middle-income countries are underrepresented, despite the fact that these settings could benefit most from accessible, cost-efficient rehabilitation models (29).

Overall, this synthesis affirms that telerehabilitation represents a credible and scalable strategy for neurorehabilitation, yet its full potential will only be realized when standardized protocols, equitable access strategies, and long-term follow-up trials are systematically implemented. Future research must also integrate patient-centered outcomes such as quality of life and caregiver burden to capture the broader psychosocial impact of telerehabilitation in neurological care (30).

# **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, telerehabilitation should be considered not only as an alternative but as a complementary and scalable component of modern neurorehabilitation. Future research must prioritize standardization, inclusivity, and long-term evaluation to ensure that the promise of telerehabilitation translates into sustainable improvements in global neurological care.

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