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COMPARISON OF TWO ROUTINE FACIAL EXERCISE PROTCOLS FOR BELL'S PALSY- A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL

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Background: There is insufficient evidence to support the use of physiotherapy in Bell's palsy in the acute stage. We aimed to assess whether facial stretching as an adjunct along with a structured exercise program improves facial symmetry and facial function more effectively than the conventional exercise regimen. **Methods:** A parallel group randomized controlled trial was done, where patients with acute Bell's palsy were enrolled from a hospital-based setting in Mangalore, India. Patients were assigned by block randomisation to receive facial stretching and structured exercise program or the conventional exercise regimen. Both the groups received electrical stimulation. The primary outcomes were facial symmetry and function that were assessed by the Sunny Brook Facial Grading System (SBFGS), House Brackmann Scale (HBS) and Facial Disability Index (FDI). Therapy was given for a duration of 3 weeks and assessment was done at baseline, 10^{th} day and 20^{th} day. Intention to treat principle was used for this study. This study is registered with Clinical Trials Registry India (CTRI/2020/02/02340). **Findings:** Between February 15 2020 and March 30 2021, 24 patients were randomly assigned to receive facial stretching and the structured exercise program and the conventional exercise regimen. The comparison of changes in resting asymmetry on the SFGS between both the groups revealed statistical significance between baseline to mid (p=0.004) and baseline to post (p=0.001). With regard to voluntary movement in the SBFGS, the difference in scores showed statistical significance between baseline to mid (p=0.023), mid to post (p=0.044) and baseline to post (p=0.013) between the group that received facial stretching and structured exercise program. **Interpretation:** Facial stretching and the structured exercise program showed promising results in enhancing facial symmetry and function than the conventional exercise regimen in the acute stages of Bell's palsy and thus helping in reducing complications.