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Remote Rehabilitation Strategies for Breast Cancer Survivors on Hormonal Therapy

Romiti Myers*

Department of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, USA

Introduction

Breast cancer remains one of the most prevalent malignancies affecting women worldwide. With advances in early detection and treatment, survival rates have significantly improved, shifting the focus of care from acute treatment to long-term survivorship. Among the standard treatment modalities, adjuvant hormonal therapy—typically involving agents such as tamoxifen or aromatase inhibitors—plays a crucial role in reducing the risk of cancer recurrence, particularly in hormone receptor-positive breast cancer. However, while effective in prolonging survival, hormonal therapy often comes with persistent side effects that negatively impact the quality of life of survivors. These side effects, including musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, hot flashes, mood disturbances, and cognitive challenges, can interfere with daily functioning and lead to reduced adherence to treatment regimens. Addressing these issues through comprehensive rehabilitation has become a key component of survivorship care. Traditional rehabilitation approaches, though beneficial, may not always be accessible to breast cancer survivors due to geographical, financial, or physical barriers. This challenge has been further amplified in the context of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has underscored the need for alternative, flexible, and scalable models of care. In this evolving landscape, remote rehabilitation—or digital rehabilitation—has emerged as a promising solution [1].

Description

Leveraging technology to deliver tailored interventions at a distance, remote rehabilitation offers a means to support physical, psychological, and functional recovery in breast cancer survivors on hormonal therapy. These interventions encompass a wide range of modalities, including telehealth consultations, mobile applications, wearable devices, online exercise programs, cognitive behavioral therapy modules, and educational platforms. Digital rehabilitation strategies for breast cancer survivors typically aim to address the multidimensional needs associated with long-term hormonal therapy. Physical rehabilitation remains a central focus, with a growing body of evidence supporting the role of exercise in managing treatment-related side effects. Structured physical activity programs, delivered remotely through videos, live coaching, or app-based tracking, have demonstrated benefits in reducing joint stiffness, improving muscular strength, alleviating fatigue, and enhancing overall physical functioning. These programs often incorporate aerobic, resistance, and flexibility training, customized to individual capabilities and goals. Remote supervision and feedback mechanisms, such as virtual physiotherapy sessions or exercise monitoring through wearable sensors, help ensure safety and adherence while fostering motivation [2].

***Address for Correspondence:** Romiti Myers, Department of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, USA, E-mail: myersrom@gmail.com*

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Alongside physical rehabilitation, addressing psychological well-being is a critical component of remote survivorship care. Hormonal therapy can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and body image concerns. Digital Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) programs have been developed to help survivors manage emotional distress, challenge negative thought patterns, and build resilience. These programs, accessible through web-based platforms or mobile apps, allow users to engage in guided self-help at their own pace, often supplemented by remote therapist support. Mindfulness based stress reduction, relaxation exercises, and virtual support groups further contribute to psychological healing, helping survivors regain a sense of control and emotional balance. Fatigue, one of the most pervasive complaints during hormonal therapy, is another target for remote intervention. Digital fatigue management programs typically combine educational content, behavioral strategies, activity pacing techniques, and personalized goal-setting to help users understand and manage their energy levels. Integrated tracking tools allow survivors to monitor their symptoms over time and identify triggers, while remote coaches or care coordinators provide guidance and accountability [3].

The inclusion of sleep hygiene education and circadian rhythm regulation strategies also plays a pivotal role, as hormonal therapy can disrupt normal sleep patterns and compound fatigue. Cognitive complaints, often referred to as “chemo brain” but also associated with hormonal therapy, present another challenge for survivors. Remote cognitive training programs, featuring interactive exercises designed to improve memory, attention, and executive function, offer a potential avenue for rehabilitation. These platforms use gamified approaches to enhance user engagement, while progress tracking enables personalization and encourages consistent practice. Emerging research suggests that such digital interventions may lead to measurable improvements in cognitive performance and functional outcomes, although further validation in larger and more diverse populations is needed. Educational support is another pillar of remote rehabilitation. Digital platforms can serve as repositories of up-to-date, evidence-based information on hormonal therapy, side effect management, nutrition, physical activity, and self-care. This not only empowers survivors with knowledge but also fosters self-efficacy and active participation in their recovery journey [4].

Tailored educational content, delivered via videos, infographics, and interactive quizzes, enhances retention and engagement. Additionally, asynchronous communication tools such as secure messaging systems allow survivors to ask questions and receive timely support from healthcare providers. A key strength of remote rehabilitation lies in its ability to offer personalized and patient-centered care. Through digital health assessments, patient-reported outcome measures, and real-time data collection, interventions can be adapted to reflect individual preferences, progress, and changing needs. Artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms are increasingly being integrated to analyze user data, predict risk factors, and recommend personalized interventions. This level of customization not only improves outcomes but also enhances user satisfaction and engagement. Despite its many advantages, the implementation of remote rehabilitation for breast cancer survivors on hormonal therapy is not without challenges. Digital literacy and access to technology remain barriers for some patients, particularly those from older or socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Ensuring that digital platforms

are user-friendly, accessible across devices, and available in multiple languages is essential to promote equity in care. In addition, privacy and data security are critical concerns, particularly when dealing with sensitive health information. Robust cybersecurity measures and adherence to regulatory standards such as HIPAA or GDPR are necessary to build trust and ensure ethical practice [5].

Conclusion

In conclusion, remote rehabilitation strategies represent a transformative shift in the way survivorship care is delivered to breast cancer survivors on hormonal therapy. By leveraging digital tools to deliver personalized, accessible, and comprehensive support, these interventions address the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by survivors during long-term treatment. While challenges related to access, integration, and validation remain, the growing body of evidence and rapid technological advancement suggest that remote rehabilitation has the potential to become a cornerstone of modern survivorship care. Continued innovation, research, and collaboration among stakeholders will be key to realizing this potential and ensuring that all breast cancer survivors, regardless of location or circumstance, can benefit from high-quality, patient-centered rehabilitation support.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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