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Analysis of Medical Rehabilitation Research in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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The purpose of this study was to analyze the state of medical rehabilitation research in Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) through the analysis of DPRK's medical journal articles, collected in the North Korea Resource Center in the ministry of Unification, South Korea. This study investigated a total 10-year collections from 2009 to 2018 on four medical journals (1: Internal medicine, 2: Surgery, 3: Preventive medicine, and 4: Korean medicine). Seven researchers analyzed collected data and initially screened PM&R related articles based on the article title. Then the second screening was conducted through a cross-examination of the title and contents of the selected articles by two Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation(PM&R) specialists. Finally the selected articles were classified into 12 categories based on the learning objectives of PM&R areas (Neurorehabilitation, Musculoskeletal rehabilitation, Spinal Cord Injury rehabilitation, Pediatric rehabilitation, Elderly rehabilitation, Sports rehabilitation, Neuromuscular rehabilitation, Physiotherapy, Assistive Technology, Cardiopulmonary rehabilitation). Then final 426 papers were selected and categorized by field, disease, author, and year. The resultant statistics and further qualitative analysis was carried out by selecting in-depth articles by two PM&R specialists.

The results of the analysis are as follows. 386 out of 7,679 articles were related to topics in PM&R fields, which accounted for 5% of total articles. 386 articles were categorized into 12 PM&R fields, 138 of which were musculoskeletal rehabilitation, 122 were neurorehabilitation, 43 were physiotherapy, and 38 were neuromuscular rehabilitation. Based on the disease names, stroke (Hemorrhagic stroke, Ischemic stroke, Concussion, etc.) was top-rated as of 73 related cases (26 cases of herniation of intervertebral disc, 25 cases of Arthritis, 23 cases of Knee Arthropathy, 18 cases of Pain, 17 cases of Motor function & Thrombosis, and 14 cases of Neuritis). Finally the research trends by year showed that the most frequently appeared research topics were the musculoskeletal rehabilitation, neurorehabilitation, physiotherapy, and neuromuscular rehabilitation (Figure 1). These areas were generally increased after year 2013, especially in the field of musculoskeletal rehabilitation.

In this study, we found that the number of research on disability and rehabilitation in DPRK steadily increased. PM&R research in DPRK became active in 2013 after DPRK revised the legislation on persons with disabilities in line with signing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Therefore we keep our efforts on collaboration with DPRK's rehabilitation medical specialists in a step-by-step manner in order to reflect the current healthcare conditions in DPRK.

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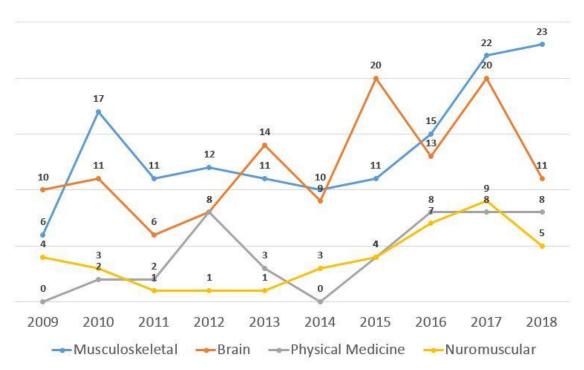


Figure 1 Recent trend in medical rehabilitation research in Democratic People's Republic of Korea