

## Notes from the Editor-in-Chief

Welcome to this executive summary of the second issue of the ASEAN Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine (2026). This edition brings together a diverse array of clinical trials, longitudinal surveys, and innovative case reports that highlight the evolving landscape of physical medicine and rehabilitation across Southeast Asia, specifically within Thailand's leading medical institutions.

The first study, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted at a general hospital, compared the effectiveness of acupuncture with electrical stimulation against ultrasound diathermy for treating myofascial neck pain in the upper trapezius. While both interventions led to improvements in disability scores (Thai-NDI), acupuncture was found to be statistically superior in reducing pain intensity on the numeric rating scale. The study concludes that acupuncture is a highly appropriate and effective method for managing trigger points and pain in the neck muscles.

Second, an ambispective cohort study on amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in a Thai tertiary care center determined a median survival time of 37 months from the onset of symptoms. The research identified that a longer interval from symptom onset to diagnosis was a key predictor of improved survival, likely reflecting a slower biological disease velocity. Notably, in this specific cohort, neither Riluzole use nor comorbidities like hypertension showed a statistically significant impact on mortality, though major complications trended toward increased risk.

Regarding stroke rehabilitation, a retrospective study at tertiary care hospital examined whether functional outcomes differed between a patient's first admission and subsequent readmissions. Despite a limited 3-week stay per admission, the results showed no significant difference in rehabilitation efficiency or effectiveness between the two groups. This suggests that readmitting stroke patients for further intensive therapy is a valid clinical strategy for maximizing recovery, particularly in hospital settings where individual stays are capped.

The second International Spinal Cord Injury (InSCI) community survey in Thailand provided a comprehensive bio-psychosocial profile of 693 individuals living with SCI. The data

revealed a predominantly male, traumatic paraplegic population facing significant socioeconomic hurdles, with over 64.0% reporting low household income. Secondary health conditions were remarkably prevalent—specifically spasticity (77.5%), pain (71.1%), and bowel issues (70.4%)—highlighting a critical need for integrated community-based rehabilitation services in Thailand.

A significant case report detailed the reversal of chronic genu recurvatum (knee hyperextension) in a stroke survivor two years post-injury. Using a year-long, systematically progressive robotic gait training program (SensibleSTEP®) combined with body weight-supported treadmill training, the patient eventually achieved independent ambulation without hyperextension. This case highlights that the “therapeutic window” for gait recovery remains open years after a stroke if structured robotic intervention and speed-challenge protocols are utilized.

In another post-stroke case, researchers evaluated the use of oral baclofen as a pharmacological adjunct to conventional speech-language therapy for severe spastic dysarthria and laryngeal tension dysphonia. While traditional therapy alone showed minimal results, the introduction of baclofen to address muscle hypertonicity led to noticeable improvements in lip seal, jaw function, and overall speech intelligibility. The study also emphasized the utility of the Frenchay Dysarthria Assessment (FDA) in capturing these subtle oromotor functional changes.

As we look toward the future of rehabilitation medicine in 2026, the research presented here underscores a vital shift toward personalized, technology-driven, and community-integrated care. Whether through the precision of robotic gait training or the broad-scale insights of the InSCI survey, our goal remains the same: to extend the therapeutic window and enhance the quality of life for every patient. We hope these findings inspire continued innovation and evidence-based practice across the ASEAN region.

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