



# Face-to-face pulmonary rehabilitation in the middle of the pandemic: patients' views

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## Abstract

On-site pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) programmes are currently scarce due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing programmes faced major routine changes to ensure safety and continuity of care with unknown impacts on patients. Thus, we explored the impact of such changes in people with chronic respiratory diseases going through PR during the pandemic.

A qualitative study was conducted. Semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed *per verbatim*. A preliminary deductive thematic analysis was performed.

17 patients (7 ILD, 8 COPD and, 2 asthma; 9 males; 63±10 years) were interviewed and 5 themes were identified. Implemented infection prevention and control measures and a closer healthcare professional (HCP)-patient interaction were identified as important factors that contributed to patients' perception of a safe environment. Reduced social interaction with peers and increased HCP workload and stress were recognised as having a negative impact. PR was perceived as essential, to break social isolation and relieve stress induced by the pandemic, and for patients to feel fitter, more capable, and confident (Fig.1).

On-site PR is valued by patients and was perceived safe and beneficial during the pandemic. Careful reflection about maintaining PR programmes closed is recommended. Future studies should also explore the impact of

these changes on PR effectiveness and seek perspectives of other stakeholders, such as HCPs.



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