after a study of 425 cases of end-result idiopathic scoliosis, that exercise should be avoided. This study found that approximately 60% of the patients treated with exercises had an increase in the deformity, and 40% had no change.

Recent work done by Stone et al (1979), has included a nine-month exercise therapy programme for 99 subjects with scoliosis and also reported poor results. However, the results of this study showed the extent to which, under the optimal conditions outlined, therapeutic exercises were capable of correcting functional scoliosis and a significant change in both body position and spinal functionality was shown after 20 weeks of treatment. The data revealed post-treatment values that suggested that some positive changes had taken place due to the therapeutic programme. It appears that in cases of lateral symmetries, young children have high potential for balancing the trunk muscles if the exercise intensity is well regulated and monitored. This should encourage clinicians to consider using exercise therapy as an important treatment for functional scoliosis.

Extreme care was taken in the present study to control testing procedures and the conduct of the treatment programme itself. It is admissible, where other outcomes are the focus, to be less rigorous with respect to the treatment itself. Thus Stone et al (1979), had subjects perform an active exercise programme at home with no supervision, as opposed to the individual attention given to each subject in the present study. However, it is the author’s opinion that without individual supervision, no valid information on the effect of exercise programmes on functional scoliosis can be achieved.

The information presented here is an attempt to show the responses of the functional scoliotic spine to an individualised and closely supervised exercise programme. This knowledge may provide a useful basis for better understanding and management of functional scoliosis, and might shed additional light on the effectiveness of exercise therapy in the treatment of this problem.

REFERENCES

THE SA JOURNAL OF PHYSIOTHERAPY IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

by Lo-an Roux, Physiotherapy Publications

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