

The Role of AI and Machine Learning in Revolutionizing Sports Physical therapy – A Call for Discussion

Zaimal Ilyas¹, Arfa Rasool¹, Aamir-ul-Memon² 

¹Riphah International University, Lahore, Pakistan

²School of Basic Medical Science, Shandong University, China

Respected Editor,

The field of sports physical therapy excites me because of how artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) can revolutionize it. They transform how athletes recover from injuries and maximize their potential over time.

The ML algorithms scrutinize an athlete's performance history, training data, and recovery metrics. For instance, ML could predict the probability of sustaining a specific type of injury given the biomechanics, the training load, and several other factors. It thus allows proactive interventions to prevent injury risks¹. Portable sensors, motion capture systems, and AI-equipped tools provide athletes with real-time movement feedback. These systems can detect the slightest deviations from standard movement patterns, thus helping prevent injuries better.

From this data-driven approach, individualized therapeutic programs could be designed to answer an athlete's needs. Moreover, qualified sports physical therapists can assist athletes in averting injuries and improving performance by managing these harmful behaviors through specific exercise and lifestyle changes². It is also crucial that rehabilitation is conducted through AI, for it tracks real-time progress and adapts therapy protocols. For example, it can gather performance data on an athlete's muscle/joint system during training sessions to ensure adequate and safe rehabilitation strategies.

This customized approach reduces the chances of re-injury and facilitates the recovery process³. AI in sports physical therapy enables virtual treatment and remote monitoring.

Athletes without easy access to professional physical therapy may greatly benefit from this. These AI-enabled solutions provide high-quality treatment to athletes, even in remote locations⁴. Over the past decade, AI has been increasingly applied to therapeutic healthcare solutions. AI enables medical professionals to analyze vast amounts of complex data, improving and personalizing patient care.

These advancements include AI-assisted diagnostic tools, prediction models for each therapeutic pathway, and workflow optimization tools. Various AI-powered tools, algorithms, and surveys have explored several areas of sports medicine, which is still a developing field. These areas include predicting and preventing athlete injuries, assisting with injury assessment, optimizing recovery plans, monitoring rehabilitation progress, and forecasting when athletes can return to play⁵.

The success of ML and AI in healthcare has grown due to advancements in data availability, computational power, and algorithm design. However, physiotherapy, particularly in sports, has yet to examine these technologies. This is concerning as AI research advances rapidly, with increasing proficiency in specialized clinical applications⁶.

Despite AI and ML integration in sports physical therapy, challenges remain particularly regarding data privacy and security. Thorough testing of AI algorithms is crucial to ensure reliability and effectiveness. AI should enhance,

Corresponding Email: aamir_mmn642@yahoo.com

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not replace, the expertise and empathy of professional physical therapists, as human judgement remains irreplaceable⁷.

Implementing AI and ML has abundant potential to improve sports physical therapy and injury rehabilitation. With these advancements, sports physical therapists will have invaluable tools to support athletes of all levels.

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