WHAT IS IT LIKE TO WALK WITH THE HELP OF A ROBOT? CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON ROBOTIC GAIT TRAINING TECHNOLOGY.

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: Robotic gait training is an emerging intervention that holds great therapeutic promise in the rehabilitation of children with neuromotor disorders such as cerebral palsy (CP). Little is known about children and parents' views on this new technology. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the expectations and experiences of children with CP in relation to robotic gait training using the Lokomat®Pro.

METHOD: An interpretivist qualitative design was employed in which perspectives of children and parents were elicited through separate semi-structured interviews to examine expectations of and experiences with the Lokomat.

RESULTS: Four themes related to children's expectations and experiences using the Lokomat were identified: (1) Not sure what to expect, but okay, I will do it; (2) It's more than just the Lokomat, it's the people that make the difference; (3) Having mixed impressions about the Lokomat; and (4) It's probably helping me, but I don't really know.

CONCLUSIONS: Rehabilitation professionals, researchers and parents are encouraged to reflect on why and how one might engage children in gait-related rehabilitation in ways that appeal to children's desires and expectations. This may shape how interventions are presented to children and how goals and outcomes are framed. Implications for Rehabilitation Children in this study did not consistently feel excited about, have a wish to use, or have a sustained interest in the use of a robotic technology, and at times experienced some anxiety in relation to their participation in the intervention. Contrary to assumptions that disabled children value walking "normally", children in this study did not express a desire to walk in typical (non-disabled) gait patterns, and equated so-called "normal" walking with their usual walking styles. Thus, we encourage clinicians, researchers and parents to reflect on why, when and how best to engage children in gait-related rehabilitation in ways that appeal to and align with children's desires and expectations.