Arch Physioter 2026; 16: 210
ISSN 2057-0082 | DOI: 10.33393/aop.2026.4048
EDITORIAL

The first Archives of Physiotherapy Best Paper Awards: recognizing research that advances the profession

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Archives of Physiotherapy is pleased to announce the winners of its first Best Paper Awards, recognizing an original research article and a systematic review published in 2025. Through these awards, we aim to recognize authors' contributions and draw readers' attention to research that exemplifies the qualities our journal seeks to promote: methodological rigour, thoughtful innovation, and relevance to the profession. The initiative also provides an opportunity to highlight how well-conducted research can inform physiotherapy practice, education, and further inquiry.

The Editors-in-Chief and Past Editors identified a shortlist of eligible articles. The Associate Editors then evaluated the shortlisted papers independently, considering their external relevance, internal validity, and innovation and potential impact. We thank all those who contributed to the selection process.

The Best Original Research Article is *"Association of physiotherapy dose with motor recovery in early subacute phase after stroke: results from a multicenter Italian study,"* by Silvia Salvalaggio and colleagues (1). The authors examined a question central to neurorehabilitation: how the amount of physiotherapy delivered during the first months after stroke relates to recovery. In their multicentre study, a higher dose was associated with better manual dexterity, but not with walking performance or independence. This distinction helps the profession think more precisely about treatment dose. Increasing it may be relevant to a specific goal, while improvements in broader aspects of recovery may require more nuanced approaches or additional interventions.

The Best Systematic Review is *"Is resistance training with external loads superior to unloaded exercise in the management of chronic low back pain? A systematic review and meta-analysis,"* by Marco Ranzani and colleagues (2). Synthesizing evidence from 13 randomized trials, the authors found that exercise with external loads can produce greater physical adaptations without a clear, clinically meaningful advantage for pain or disability compared with unloaded exercise. Their findings inform a common decision in physiotherapy practice: how to prescribe exercise for people with chronic low back pain. They encourage clinicians to consider the individual, the goals of treatment, and factors such as exercise volume and adherence, rather than assuming that greater load will necessarily lead to better clinical outcomes.

These two papers exemplify the qualities these awards seek to recognize. Each begins with a practical question, examines it carefully, and offers conclusions that respect the complexity of clinical care. We congratulate the winning authors and thank them, along with all our authors, reviewers, and editors, for their commitment to advancing the profession.

References

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Received: October 5, 2026
Accepted: October 5, 2026
Published online: November 2, 2026

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