



Revista Portuguesa de  
**Cardiologia**  
Portuguese Journal of **Cardiology**  
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PERSPECTIVES IN CARDIOLOGY

## Mandatory criteria for cardiac rehabilitation programs: 2018 guidelines from the Portuguese Society of Cardiology

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Received 16 January 2018; accepted 18 February 2018

### KEYWORDS

Norms;  
Guidelines;  
Cardiac rehabilitation programs;  
Portuguese Society of Cardiology

**Abstract** Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) is a multidisciplinary process for patients recovering after an acute cardiac event or with chronic cardiovascular disease that reduces mortality and morbidity and improves quality of life. It is considered a cost-effective intervention and is expressly indicated in the guidelines of the major medical societies.

In Portugal, only 8% of patients discharged from hospital after myocardial infarction are included in CR programs. In Europe overall, the percentage admitted to CR programs is 30%, while in the USA it is 20-30%.

In view of the underuse of CR in Portugal, we call the attention of the health authorities to the need to increase the number and national coverage of CR programs, while maintaining high quality standards. The aim is for all patients resident in Portugal who are eligible for CR programs to have the same opportunities for access and attendance.

In order to preserve the benefits and safety of this intervention, CR needs to be performed according to international guidelines. The fact that various initiatives in this field have been developed by different professional groups, some of them non-medical, that do not follow the European guidelines, has prompted us to prepare a series of norms defining mandatory criteria for CR, based on current knowledge and evidence. In this way we aim to ensure that the required

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.repc.2018.02.006>

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## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Normas;  
Recomendações;  
Programas de  
Reabilitação  
Cardíaca;  
Sociedade Portuguesa  
de Cardiologia

increase in the number of CR programs, linked in a national network of CR centers, does not detract from the need to maintain their efficacy and quality. These criteria should serve as the basis for the future accreditation of CR centers in Portugal.

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## Crítérios mandatórios para programas de reabilitação cardíaca: normas da Sociedade Portuguesa de Cardiologia 2018

**Resumo** A reabilitação cardíaca é um processo multidisciplinar de recuperação do doente após evento cardiovascular agudo ou com doença cardíaca crónica, que conduz à redução da mortalidade e morbidade e melhoria da qualidade de vida. Considera-se uma intervenção custo-eficaz com indicação formal expressa em recomendações das mais importantes sociedades científicas internacionais.

Em Portugal, apenas 8% dos doentes com alta hospitalar após enfarte são incluídos em programas de reabilitação cardíaca. Na Europa, a percentagem de admissão nesses programas é em média de 30%, enquanto nos Estados Unidos da América esse percentual se situa entre 20-30%.

Pela subutilização franca da reabilitação cardíaca em Portugal, chamamos a atenção das autoridades de saúde para a necessidade de aumentar o número e a distribuição dos programas de reabilitação cardíaca no território nacional e manter padrões de elevada qualidade. Pretende-se que todos os doentes residentes em Portugal elegíveis para programa de reabilitação cardíaca possam ter idênticas condições de acesso e atendimento relativamente aos programas.

Para que os benefícios e a segurança dessa intervenção sejam salvaguardados, implica que o programa de reabilitação cardíaca seja aplicado como é preconizado nas diretrizes internacionais. A existência de várias iniciativas por parte de diferentes grupos profissionais, inclusive não médicos, com pretensão de intervir nesse campo, sem respeito pelas recomendações formais europeias, levou à elaboração de um conjunto de normas que definem os critérios mandatórios para a reabilitação cardíaca, com base no conhecimento e na evidência científica atual. Pretendemos dessa forma garantir que o necessário aumento do número de programas de reabilitação cardíaca não seja dissociado da necessária eficiência e qualidade dos mesmos, articulados numa rede nacional de centros de reabilitação cardíaca. Esses critérios deverão servir de base à futura e necessária acreditação dos Centros de Reabilitação Cardíaca em Portugal.

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## Introduction

The present paper is the product of study and reflection by members of the Portuguese Society of Cardiology (SPC), in particular the SPC's Working Group on Exercise Physiology and Cardiac Rehabilitation, most of whom are cardiologists, with the purpose of alerting the health authorities to the deficiencies in cardiovascular prevention and rehabilitation in Portugal and the need to increase the number and national coverage of cardiac rehabilitation (CR) programs, while assuring criteria of quality and efficacy, described below.

Only through rational and balanced distribution of a greater number of cardiac rehabilitation centers, with programs fulfilling the criteria defined in these recommendations, will it be possible to ensure equality of access for all cardiovascular patients to a cost-effective intervention that is safe and indicated as essential due to all its proven benefits.

These criteria for CR, based on the current guidelines of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC)/European Association of Preventive Cardiology (EAPC),<sup>1</sup> the American Heart Association/American Association of Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Rehabilitation (AHA/AACPR),<sup>2</sup> the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association,<sup>3</sup> the American College of Cardiology Foundation/American Heart Association,<sup>4</sup> and the British Association for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation,<sup>5</sup> should be mandatory and serve as a basis for the future accreditation of CR centers in Portugal, to be developed in the short term.

## Rationale

### Definition of cardiac rehabilitation

CR is defined as an intervention intended to help the patient recover or improve their physical, psychological, social and vocational functioning after an acute cardiac event or

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