

Feasibility of Tele-Rehabilitation during COVID-19 Pandemic: Perceived Barriers and Facilitators among Physiotherapy Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The virulent and unpredictable nature of COVID 19 resulted in adoption of telehealth making it imperative and impending in delivering rehabilitation services. Robust evidence illustrates the significance and efficacy of telerehabilitation to optimize the participation in rehabilitation program taking into account organisational, geographical and transportation aspects. Despite knowing the remarkable benefits, there exist an array of challenges to implement telerehabilitation services in a setting with meagre resources. In order to augment the uptake of telerehabilitation services, our study aims to explore the perceived barriers and facilitators to enhance telerehabilitation during COVID 19 among Physiotherapy professional in a resource limited setting.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among physiotherapy professionals in Maharashtra using a questionnaire with a content validation index of 0.95. The survey sought to ascertain the awareness, barriers, facilitators and strategies to improve practice of telerehabilitation.

Results: A total of 450 Physiotherapists were invited, of which, 201 participated in the study. The major barriers to telerehabilitation were inaccuracy in obtaining adequate information (n=149, 74%), lack of face-to-face monitoring (n=131, 65%) and physical limitation in older adults (n=114, 57%); on the other hand, the facilitators were reduced transportation time to hospital/clinic (n=132, 67%) and improved accessibility to healthcare services (n=125, 62%). According to the participants, the major barriers to patient participation were lack of computer literacy (n=173, 86%), patients' physical impairments (n= 133, 67%) and impact of patients' geographical location on internet connectivity (n= 132, 66%) and the factors that enabled the patients to participate were flexible appointment schedule (n=139, 69%) and minimal transportation costs (n=129, 64%). Furthermore, the participants majorly considered encouraging patients' appropriate environment, insurance coverage, training and upskilling of clinicians as the strategies to improve practice.

Conclusion: The implementation of telerehabilitation program has been limited due to perceived constraints associated with various organizational, geographical and patient factors. However, Physiotherapists reported strategies to improve practices could be implemented to accelerate the utilization of telerehabilitation services.

Keywords: Tele-rehabilitation, COVID-19

