Testing apps to help stroke and brain injury patients

December 4 2017, by Amy Mcsweeny

Stroke and brain injury patients are being guided on the best choice of digital help thanks to students in the School of Health Professions at the University of Plymouth, in collaboration with a national network of healthcare professionals.

Alongside organisations including Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust (NDHT) and Livewell Southwest, students are clinically testing apps to see if they are suitable to be part of the mytherappy website – a database of clinically recommended health apps developed by the stroke and neuro rehab team at NDHT.

The mytherappy website is an app review website that helps patients, carers and clinicians find the best apps to help with rehabilitation and recovery following a neurological disorder, such as a stroke or brain injury.

Now the collaboration will see undergraduate and postgraduate students test new apps on a monthly basis. They are joining mytherappy's national network of app testers, which includes clinical specialists in stroke, neurology and head injuries, therapists, nurses, psychologists, patients and carers. Apps that have been tested by the network and meet mytherappy's robust set of testing criteria are featured on the mytherappy website, which anyone can access.

Occupational therapy and physiotherapy students were the first students to be trained in how to test apps, with Ruth Siewruk, advanced

practitioner occupational therapist for neuro and stroke, and Louise Holmes, both from NDHT, attending to deliver the session.

Louise, who is also a [student](#) on the University's MSc Advanced Professional Practice Neurological Rehabilitation, said:

"There are a host of apps available to help patients through their rehabilitation after they've suffered a stroke or other brain injury – and our patients often ask us which ones are the most effective. So colleagues at the Trust set up mytherappy, where patients can see which apps are recommended by clinicians and other users. This is where the students come in – by using their theoretical and practical skills they can help analyse the apps' effectiveness for people at various stages of rehabilitation."

Amanda Denton, Lecturer in Neurological Rehabilitation, said:

"It's great that the University is collaborating on this project and we're pleased to be able to help and guide patients' choices. The training session was really helpful for our students and, as well as learning more about the technology available to help patients, they can also understand how the technology can help those delivering rehabilitation. The students are looking forward to testing apps over the course of the year."

The mytherappy website is having a global impact – with more than 20,000 users worldwide. Following a six-month audit of neuro patients at NDHT, 93 per cent of the patients who used apps said they would recommend mytherappy and app usage as part of their treatment. When comparing patients who used apps with those who didn't, the outcomes of those who used apps were improved by 10 per cent.

Ruth Siewruk, occupational therapist at NDHT and founder of mytherappy, said:

"I am delighted that students from the University of Plymouth have joined our testing network after training with us. We want to empower patients to manage their health in the way that is right for them, and the mytherappy website helps those who are recovering from a stroke or brain injury to do exactly that."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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