Few physiotherapists used telerehabilitation services during the COVID-19 pandemic

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In this study, the researchers aimed to study the implementation of telerehabilitation during the pandemic through support from different digital tools (e.g. telephone, video meetings, and mobile applications) in physiotherapists in Sweden. 307 physiotherapists working with older adults or patients with neurological diseases answered a digital survey regarding the use of remote rehabilitation and digital tools during the pandemic, including their own ability, perception and need for telerehabilitation.

A majority conducted rehabilitation on site

The result showed that a majority of physiotherapists did not conduct telerehabilitation neither before (74%) nor during (52%) the pandemic. Telephone was the most frequently used tool by the physiotherapists (68%) to follow up and give patient advice, while video meetings, mobile applications and digital platforms were used in a limited capacity. Factors perceived by the physiotherapists to limit the use of telerehabilitation, was the patients' ability to use existing digital tools and the current reimbursement system that regulates health care. Despite this, most of the physiotherapists regarded telerehabilitation as an important part of rehabilitation and were interested in learning more on implementing this in their clinical work.

The need to develop telerehabilitation

The study highlights the difficulties and challenges in digitalization of rehabilitation and health promoting services in Sweden, which has also been reported earlier during the pandemic from patient organizations, among others.

"I see a great need to develop simple and user-
friendly digital solutions to enable digital rehabilitation and health promotion for all patient groups," says David Moulæe Conradsson, docent at the Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society (NVS), one of the authors of the study. "As a consequence of the pandemic, we have seen a general increase in the use of digital health care, but the implementation for older adults and patients with neurological disease have been slow, and more research is needed in collaboration with clinicians and patients to promote remote rehabilitation services."


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