

A PILOT STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES AND EFFECTS OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES FOR ARTHROPLASTY OUTPATIENTS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SCENARIO

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INTRODUCTION



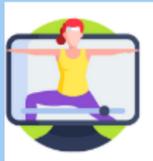
On the 5th of March 2020, the first positive case of COVID-19 was reported in South Africa leading to the announcement of a National Lockdown. This had tremendous implications in the way in which health services had to be prioritised and delivered. Subsequently there was a circular mandating health care institutions to find means to deliver health services using online platforms rather than visiting physical service points.

AIM



Telerehabilitation is a concept where physiotherapy services are delivered at a distance by means of electronic communication. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated that a telerehabilitation approach be adopted for patients attending arthroplasty outpatient physiotherapy clinic at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital. The purpose of this study was therefore to determine the effects of this as well as to record the patient/caregiver and physiotherapist experiences of telehealth services.

METHODOLOGY



This was a prospective study on a purposively selected convenient sample of patients who had attended individual face-to-face sessions with the physiotherapists prior to the national lockdown but were not prioritised for face-to-face consultation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University and informed consent was obtained from the participants. All telehealth sessions were conducted as per a standardized operating procedure and outcomes were recorded using a standardized assessment framework.

RESULTS



Experience of care information was collected through open ended questions. Descriptive data was tabulated, and trends presented in the form of graphs (Fig 1). Themes were identified from the qualitative data and presented as a narrative.

Patient	Outcome Measure	1 st Telehealth Session Score	2 nd Telehealth Session Score
A	HOOS	9/28	3/28
B	KOOS	4/28	0/28
C	KOOS	19/28	3/28
D	HOOS	9/28	4/28

Figure 1: Comparison of outcome measures pre and post telehealth intervention

CONCLUSIONS



Telehealth offered a suitable means for continued services in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario. Improvements were noted in outcomes and patients, therapists had positive experiences in receiving and offering these services, respectively. It was recommended that the feasibility of offering these services as an emergency plan be explored across other health sectors as well as its long-term application in the post-pandemic scenario

DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE STUDY



This project is being adopted by the Gauteng Provincial Health Department and the steps are underway to implement this project across the province in line with the Digital Health Strategy. The project was also the second runner up at the awards hosted by the Centre for Public Service Innovation 2021. The project was also presented by the National Department of Health at the COSP 15 steering committee.

Ebrahim, H., Pillay-Jayaraman, P., Leibovitz, Y., Naidoo, N., Bulmer, T., Bull, B., Lord, S. and Keller, M.M., 2021. Experiences and effects of telerehabilitation services for physiotherapy outpatients in a resource-constrained public health set-up in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic: A proposal. South African Journal of Physiotherapy, 77(1), p.1528.

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