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# Investigating the attitudes of physiotherapists about telerehabilitation and their opinions on its feasibility in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Telerehabilitation has not been a permitted nor been a focus in healthcare in South Africa. There is little awareness, knowledge, and skill amongst physiotherapists on how to conduct effective telerehabilitation. However, this is not the case globally, where telerehabilitation has been proven effective in the treatment of patients with various conditions. Advances in telerehabilitation worldwide are occurring daily but there is scarce literature on telerehabilitation in South Africa. Due to Covid-19, the HPCSA has granted permission to conduct telehealth, however, numerous barriers first need to be overcome for telerehabilitation to become a common therapeutic practice. The attitudes of physiotherapists on telerehabilitation and its feasibility have not been investigated and hence the current use, or willingness to use, is unknown amongst the South African population.

**Aim:** To investigate the attitudes of physiotherapists and their opinions on the feasibility of telerehabilitation in daily practice in South Africa.

**Methods:** This quantitative, cross-sectional study included 356 physiotherapists belonging to the SASP, recruited through convenience sampling. An electronic self-reported questionnaire was developed from existing literature and other exiting questionnaires e.g. the Physiotherapy Mobile Acceptance Questionnaire (PTMAQ) (Blumenthal, Wilkinson, and Chignell, 2018). The questionnaire was emailed to all physiotherapists belonging to the SASP and they could voluntarily answer it. Descriptive data analysis was conducted to describe the demographic profile of physiotherapists and to determine their attitudes on telerehabilitation as well as the feasibility thereof in South Africa. One-Way ANOVA (analyses of variance) was used to establish a relationship between participants' demographics and their attitudes and feasibility

regarding the use of technology for rehabilitation in South Africa. The study obtained ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical), clearance number M200946.

**Results:** Most participants were between the ages of 25-35 (170, 47.8%), working more than 20 years (101, 28.4%), mostly in orthopaedic manipulative therapy (137, 38%) and in outpatient practice (199, 55.9%). Most participants had positive attitudes regarding the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Valdez et al., 2009). Only 18.3% of participants used telerehabilitation in their clinical settings and less than half of the participants state that they would be willing to use telerehabilitation in their clinical setting. Only 37.3% of participants thought that the South African population would be receptive to telerehabilitation. Most participants thought that there is not enough knowledge (308, 86.5%) and awareness (262, 73.6%) about telerehabilitation but do have the capacity and resources to conduct telerehabilitation sessions in their clinical settings (227, 63.8%). Participants in OMT and outpatient practice had a more favourable attitude toward telerehabilitation. No significant effects of age were found.

**Conclusion**: Physiotherapists show positive attitudes on the use of telerehabilitation but are not willing to do it in their clinical settings due to numerous barriers that affect the feasibility thereof. This study is one of the first to investigate the attitudes of physiotherapists on the use of telerehabilitation, however, further studies need to be conducted to examine the effectiveness of telerehabilitation amongst physiotherapists in South Africa. It is the hope that the awareness, knowledge, and skill to conduct telerehabilitation increases among physiotherapists in South Africa so that use of telerehabilitation can become common practice.