

Title: The Validation of a Survey for Orthopedic Outpatient Physical Therapy and the Usage of Telehealth

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic caused an abrupt shift to social-distancing which changed the way many people work – including clinicians and health care providers. In these unprecedented times, telehealth has been championed as a means to reduced exposure, maintain social distancing, and continue to meet patient needs.¹ Telehealth has many well-documented barriers that include inadequate reimbursement, lack of technology infrastructure, lack of clinician training, etc.² In addition, clinical practices that rely on direct “hands on” examinations and interventions, such as outpatient orthopedic physical therapy, may face additional barriers. The utilization of telehealth will likely continue beyond the current pandemic.³ Although a virtual orthopedic examination may lack the vital elements of palpation and manual testing, the current situation necessitates that we utilize available resources to optimize the quality and outcome of a patient’s virtual visit.³ The purpose of this project is to develop an electronic survey to help understand how confident current and future orthopedic physical therapists are in practicing in a telehealth environment, while identifying both advantages of and barriers to telehealth practice in the outpatient orthopedic physical therapy setting.

A preliminary 34-item questionnaire was developed based on the American Board of Physical Therapy’s Description of Residency Practice of Orthopedics. The initial draft was presented to 6 licensed orthopedic physical therapists, 3 Ithaca College physical therapy graduate students, and 1 survey developer/researcher for an e-Delphi survey. In the e-Delphi, participants rated the survey as a whole, its title, and the individual survey items for clarity and comprehensiveness on 9-point Likert scale (1 = not at all and 9 = Extremely so). Items with a mean score of 8 or higher were retained to the survey instrument and items scoring below 8 were reviewed by the research team and edited based on comments from the e-Delphi reviewer team. Following these revisions, a second round of the e-Delphi was conducted, and consensus was set to 80%. Overall, panelists indicated that 100% of items were clear and comprehensive, while stating that there was some confusion with clarity and wording of certain sections. Overall, feedback was positive with exceptional considerations to improve the validation. Preliminary results suggest that e-Delphi participants showed a positive attitude towards the idea of the survey, and presented with minor suggestions for improvement of wording, category names, and content.

Mean scores for clarity and comprehensiveness were 8.35 (SD= 0.2), indicating overwhelming support for the survey as written. To date, the amended survey was just re-sent to the e-Delphi panel for its second review. Overall, it appears that this survey instrument has demonstrated preliminary face and content validity according to our panel and thus may prove a useful tool in better understanding how current and soon-to-be outpatient orthopedic physical therapists perceive their ability to practice via telehealth. A more thorough understanding of perceived barriers and confidence in practicing outpatient orthopedic physical therapy in a telehealth

environment can be used to investigate the acceptance of telemedicine and to improve its applications.

References:

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