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Supporting Health By Technology XII

Title: Primary care physiotherapists' and older clients' experiences and needs for home rehabilitation supported by eHealth

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Abstract

Background:

Primary care physiotherapists face an increasing number of older patients who are in need of home rehabilitation. Challenges in patient care include not only the patient's behavioral changes in exercising but also the way healthcare professionals from different disciplines collaborate. eHealth offers opportunities to support patients as well as primary healthcare professionals to reach effective home rehabilitation. More research into the current practices is needed. This exploratory study reports on the experiences, wishes and needs from these stakeholders with regards to using eHealth to support patient's behavioral changes in exercising and professional collaboration.

Methods:

Qualitative methods were used: ten semi-structured interviews (six with physiotherapists and four with patients), two focus groups with two physiotherapists per session were carried out. The results of these interviews and focus groups were used to set out an online questionnaire to the regional professional network. Ten participants filled out the questionnaire.

Findings:

The importance of eHealth for interprofessional collaboration (IPC) and exercise behavior of clients is clearly recognized by the participants.

The physiotherapists use different eHealth applications depending on the task at hand such as supporting client's home exercises, updating patient dossier or information sharing. The barriers that arise to collaborate have mainly to do with the connection between existing applications, data exchange and the lack of a central digital platform. eHealth applications mentioned in relation to client's exercise



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behavior varies e.g. setting goals, self-monitoring or remote consultation. In addition, lack of motivation, limited social support and impaired cognition are reported as barriers to the client's exercise behavior.

Opinions of the older clients regarding the use of eHealth varied. The main use making medical appointments using computers. Face to face contact remains important for exercising. Better access to their own patient file was deemed desirable. With regards to IPC, the clients mentioned having to deal with more than one primary care professional, and experienced limited communication between professionals. No eHealth application was used to support this process.

In addition, three clustered themes for IPC emerged. 1) Communication (e.g. knowledge sharing and short lines); 2) Relationships (e.g. interdependence, roles and responsibilities and shared accountability); and 3) Client-centered (e.g. patient care and positive health). Cluster Communication is both obstructive and facilitating, while cluster Relationships is the most obstructive and cluster Client-centered the most facilitating.

Discussion:

Rehabilitation at home of the older client is a complex process and can benefit from an approach supporting different perspectives, namely facilitating exercise behavior, interprofessional collaboration between primary care professionals and the use eHealth to support these processes. This study has elicited the experiences, wishes and needs of primary care physiotherapists and clients with regard to eHealth for exercise behavior and interprofessional collaboration.

Use of eHealth applications supporting IPC en exercise behavior appears to be limited and fragmented, making it difficult to effectively connect various eHealth applications. A central digital platform is therefore desirable. In addition, more attention should be given to the relational cluster of IPC and to the factors supporting the client's exercise behavior (e.g. motivation, capabilities and opportunity).

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