

Telehealth education and training in entry-to-practice physiotherapy programs in Australian universities: a qualitative study with university educators.

A visual summary for university educators



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For specific details about the study, please refer to the following publication:

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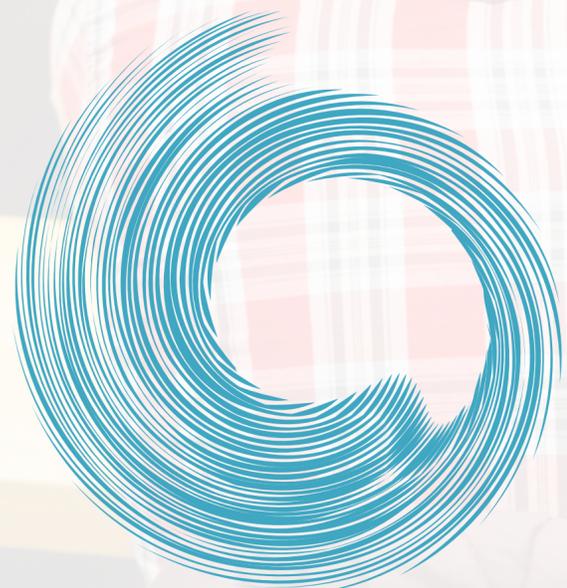
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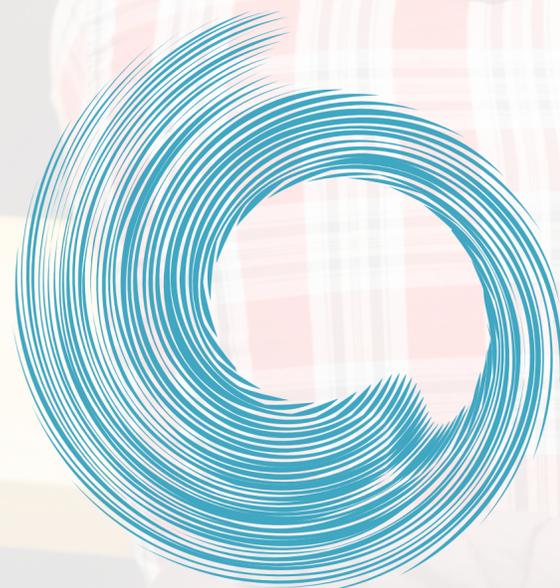
BACKGROUND

Importance of this research

Physiotherapists rapidly pivoted to delivering care via telehealth (telephone and/or video conferencing consultations) during the COVID-19 pandemic to comply with social distancing measures, allowing them to provide essential care to patients. As we move forward and adapt to a new “normal” there will still be instances where telehealth will be a necessity. Furthermore, many clinicians are choosing to continue to offer telehealth services into the future despite resumption of in-person consultations, because it increases access to healthcare for people living in regional or remote areas, and indeed is convenient and acceptable to patients in all geographical areas.

Therefore, it is important that the emerging physiotherapy workforce is proficient in the delivery of care via telehealth. However, it is unclear whether telehealth curriculum is included in undergraduate and postgraduate health professional education, with literature highlighting the limited amount of published research on the extent to which telehealth curricula is being integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate allied health training programs.

In Australia, it was unknown how telehealth education and training was being provided in physiotherapy programs across Australian universities. Thus, research was required to understand the current teaching of telehealth curriculum in Australian entry-to-practice programs, to guide and inform the future development of physiotherapy program curricula.



METHODOLOGY



University educators teaching into Australian entry-to-practice physiotherapy programs were invited to participate



16 university educators from 14 universities participated in this study



Analysis occurred in parallel with data collection using an inductive thematic approach



Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by an external provider specialising in transcription services

RESULTS

Three themes (with associated sub themes) were identified

Theme 1

Telehealth education has a role in contemporary physiotherapy practice

Sub Themes

- COVID-19 pandemic was a driver for telehealth education
- Telehealth is here to stay
- Telehealth education should focus on communication and clinical reasoning

Exemplary quote

"I think it's [telehealth education] essential because it is an expectation that they [students] will be able to use it when they graduate in some way, shape, or form" (P14)

Theme 2

Telehealth education and training vary substantially

Sub Themes

- Content and assessment are ad-hoc
- Telehealth exposure is inconsistent across clinical placements

Exemplary quote

"Look, it's just ad hoc. So, it's more if it, you know, if someone designs a case that has an access issue, then Telehealth will be discussed but not formally" (P4)

Theme 3

Challenges in telehealth education

Sub Themes

- Finding space and time in the curriculum
- Insufficient telehealth expertise
- Program review and development provide opportunities

Exemplary quote

"There's always that constant pull from everywhere, wanting more of this in the curriculum or of that in the curriculum" (P1)

CONCLUSION

Implementing telehealth education and training into entry-to-practice physiotherapy programs

Challenges

- Finding space in the curriculum
- Insufficient telehealth expertise among academic and clinical staff
- Responding to international and local trends in clinical practice

Facilitators

Opportunities for telehealth implementation:

- During formal program review
- When revising content/writing new subjects
- Writing curriculum for new entry-to-practice physiotherapy programs

Recommendations

Entry-to-practice physiotherapy programs could benefit from including the following:

- Incorporating telehealth content into case-base scenarios
- Teaching advanced communication skills for a digital environment
- Instructing students how to modify and adjust in-person assessment and treatment methods for a digital environment
- Providing practical telehealth experience (including simulated learning using telephone or videoconferencing)
- Implementing pre-existing telehealth education and training developed by external providers

Internationally developed capability frameworks for physiotherapists delivering care via telehealth are freely available to guiding curriculum development . These can be accessed by [clicking here](#)



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