
San Marcos, Fall 2019

Research Day, San Marcos Campus

12-13-2019

Perspectives of Occupational Therapists on Telehealth

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Recommended Citation

Corey, Taylor; Cohill, Becki; and MacDermott, Susan, "Perspectives of Occupational Therapists on Telehealth" (2019). *San Marcos, Fall 2019*. 10.

<https://soar.usa.edu/casmfall2019/10>

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Perspectives of Occupational Therapists on Telehealth

Taylor Corey; Becki Cohill, OTD, OTR/L; and Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

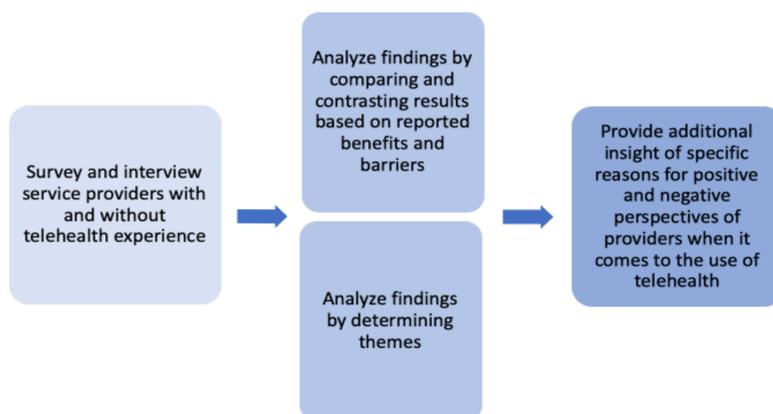
BACKGROUND

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) defines telehealth “as the application of evaluative, consultative, preventative, and therapeutic services delivered through *information and communication technology*” (2018, p. 1). The evidence is positive that telehealth is an effective service delivery model for occupational therapy (AOTA, 2018), however, there is little research when it comes to the occupational therapist's perspective and experiences on telehealth services (Dunleavy, Preissner, & Finlayson, 2013).

PURPOSE

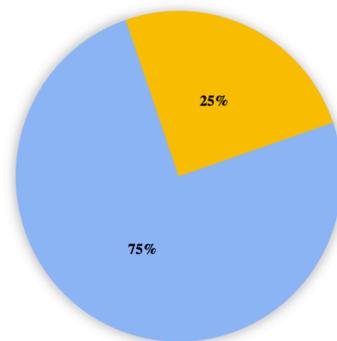
The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of the provider’s perspectives about the strengths and barriers of OT services provided via telehealth. Centered around those perspectives of telehealth, the results can help explore the issues and concerns therapists have when it comes to telehealth as a service delivery model.

METHOD



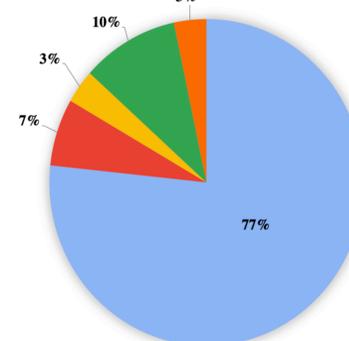
RESULTS

n = 16
 Occupational Therapist (n = 12) Occupational Therapy Assistant (n = 0)
 Speech and Language Pathologist (n = 4) Physical Therapist (n = 0)
 Physical Therapy Assistant (n = 0)



Total Number of Service Providers Who Have Used Telehealth Based on Discipline

n = 30
 Occupational Therapist (n = 23) Occupational Therapy Assistant (n = 2)
 Speech and Language Pathologist (n = 1) Physical Therapist (n = 3)
 Physical Therapy Assistant (n = 1)



Total Number of Service Providers Who Have Not Used Telehealth Based on Discipline

Major Themes	
Theme Name	Definition
Accessibility	Any comment that mentioned increase access to services or service providers
Efficacy	Comments that compare telehealth to in-person sessions and how well it works.
Flexibility	Any comment that reports using flexibility as a reason for using telehealth.
Technology	Comments that mentions technology (i.e: internet connection) in reference to telehealth.

“Once therapists have a routine of how they do things and it’s a system that works well. You are reluctant to change.”—Occupational Therapist

Most Reported Benefits	
Responses from Service Providers who Have Used Telehealth (n = 16)	Responses from Service Providers who Have Not Used Telehealth (n = 30)
1. Improve accessibility of services/care (88%)	1. Improve accessibility of services/care (87%)
2. Flexibility in scheduling appointments (69%)	2. Flexibility in scheduling appointments (77%)
3. May promote more engagement and active participation by the client/caregiver (63%)	3. Reduced travel time (70%)
4. Reduce travel time (63%)	4. Prevention of delays to see a specialist (60%)
5. Prevention of delays to see a specialist (38%)	5. A cost-effective tool for providing services (37%)
6. A cost-effective tool for providing services (38%)	6. May promote more engagement and active participation by the client/caregiver (37%)
7. Helps with transitions within the home environment (24%)	8. Tool for referrals, consultations, and screens (16%)
8. Mitigate cancellations (19%)	

Most Reported Barriers	
Responses from Service Providers who Have Used Telehealth (n = 16)	Responses from Service Providers who Have Not Used Telehealth (n = 30)
1. Apprehension by practitioners and clients (88%)	1. Lack of physical contact (93%)
2. Limited technology including infrastructure, interoperability, technology difficulties and challenges (81%)	2. Concerns of decrease quality of care (90%)
3. Practitioners not ready to adopt a new system of technology due to need for familiarity (63%)	3. Apprehension by practitioners and clients (87%)
4. Financial difficulties including lack of reimbursement, sustained funding, and/or initial investment required (44%)	4. Limited technology including infrastructure, interoperability, technology difficulties and challenges (70%)
5. State licensure issues (19%)	5. Lack of ability to establish therapeutic relationships (67%)
6. The need of more rigorous research to help support the use of telehealth (13%)	6. Lack of rigorous research in support of the use of telehealth (53%)
7. Lack of regulations to monitor telehealth (13%)	7. Financial difficulties including lack of reimbursement, sustained funding, and/or initial investment required (40%)
8. Isolation from other therapists (13%)	8. Practitioners not ready to adopt a new system of technology due to uncertainty and need for familiarity (37%)
	9. Privacy and security concerns (37%)

Provider's Perceptions of Telehealth

- “I think it is an easier thing for them to get out of therapy. I think there could be more cancellations. Like I show up to their house and they can't really not answer the door. They could just be like oh my computer broke or I ran out of battery. So they have more control or power whether or not the kiddo will get the therapy”—Occupational Therapist
- “Once therapists have a routine of how they do things and it’s a system that works well. You are reluctant to change.”—Occupational Therapist
- “I am apprehensive as I find it easier to have in person conversations so I can use language and hands on techniques to ensure full comprehension. However, I also feel that maximizing services and availability of services to people is beneficial.”—Physical Therapist

Provider's Experiences with Telehealth:

- “We actually have a better cancellation rate for telehealth than we did for in the clinic... our overall cancellation rate was about 17% and in the clinic it ranges anything more than 20%.”—Occupational Therapist
- “There is this trend in pediatric therapy where parents just drop off their kid at the clinic and are not involved in session, telehealth allows the parents to be more involved with better carryover at the home.”—Occupational Therapist
- “It’s because it’s an emerging area for professionals, so not everyone understands what online sessions entail. And not everyone understands that therapy doesn’t mean having your hands on a patient throughout the whole session.”—Occupational Therapist

“Get yourself familiar with the skills that are needed for that service [telehealth]... And then not being scared to try new things because it is not perfect face to face. What makes you think it’s going to be perfect online.”—Occupational Therapist

DISCUSSION

The results from this study:

1. Provide insight on reasons providers hold positive or negative perspectives on telehealth
2. Show providers who have experience with telehealth differ in their perspectives on telehealth from providers who have no telehealth experience **AND** these differences are specific to perceived barriers.

FUTURE OF TELEHEALTH

- Providers who have no experience with telehealth are apprehensive when using it to deliver services.
- Participants reported uncertainty about the limitations of using telehealth **BUT** expressed interest in using it in the future.
- Many reported they did not know how to get started or involved in telehealth

Future research should investigate providing education for providers related to telehealth. Education can include graduate students and provide CEUs for providers working in their field. An introduction to telehealth may ease apprehension and uncertainties for providers who have not used it to deliver services.

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