

# A Paradigm Shift Due to Pandemic: From Conventional Care to Telerehabilitation

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Rehabilitation sciences and health profession have not looked the same since the COVID-19 pandemic started to affect Pakistan in late February 2019. A Country with scarce tertiary- care health facilities, growing elderly population, vast sum of persons with disability and majority living in remote rural area with limited logistics; the superimposed lockdowns, fear of contracting COVID-19 and closure of Outpatient Departments have resulted in limited access to health care and rehabilitation facilities, especially to the ones present in remote areas of the country. In addition, it has also resulted in the decrease of contact hours and revenue of almost all health professions and facilities. Rehabilitation clinics had fewer patients walking through their doors during the early stages of pandemic. Many rehabilitation professionals like physical therapists, speech-language therapists, occupational therapists, orthotics and prosthetics are facing an increase in their financial hardships; although the pandemic is more likely to have augmented career pride than declining it.(1) In such a situation, use of telehealth and other video-based consultations have increased.(2)

Earlier to the pandemic, telehealth was an exception to the role of rehabilitation sciences. However, since then Telerehabilitation services have significantly improved but technology challenges among patients and clinics remain a barrier to its broader use.(3)

As Telerehabilitation is defined as “the delivery of rehabilitation services by information and communication technologies” at a distance, it offers a possible alternative or supplement to center-based rehabilitation services. Home-based interventions that can be prescribed through telerehabilitation for pain management, improving physical functions, quality of life,(4) management of musculoskeletal and other related issues include stretching, resistance training, core stability training, TENS, and balance training etc.

Telerehabilitation services include therapeutic interventions, education, consultation, training, and

means of networking for a person with disabilities. Using technology to deliver rehabilitation services offers many benefits to not only the rehabilitation experts but also to the patients themselves. It provides the patient with a sense of personal autonomy and empowerment, allowing them to take control in the management of their disorders, (5) decreasing pain, improving ergonomics, movements, and exercising at home.

As telerehabilitation expands patient’s continuity of care, improves an opportunity to continue rehabilitation services within the patient’s own social and vocational environment, it should lead to better functional outcomes. With the ever-increasing realm of technology, the future generation of rehabilitation experts must be aware of the evolving changes in technology to make rehabilitation an interactive environment with the patient. Researches with focus on exploring such telerehabilitation tools and their effects on patient’s condition, experience, and its cross cultural adaptation are necessary. Future challenges might include telehealth adoption, educational costs, exemplary patient care, stress management and new referral sources.(6) Although many challenges have been set into motion for the rehabilitation community, it would be disappointing not to use this time as an opportunity to embrace changes and explore innovation. In the rehabilitation sciences, telerehabilitation and virtual platforms have placed greater emphasis on self and home-care options for patients.(7)

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