

Tele-rehabilitation in Physiotherapy

Guidelines for Physiotherapists



Introduction

Ninety-five percent of the Canadian landmass is serviced by only 8% of registered physiotherapists¹. This creates vast areas where patients have difficulty accessing care due to distance, bad weather or the absence of physiotherapy services.

Tele-rehabilitation² technologies and applications are expanding rapidly and could improve patient access to care and otherwise increase efficiencies when used with the right patient at the right time. In some cases, such as when travel is difficult or there is no provider nearby, the use of the technology is preferable to a traditional (in-person) encounter.

In some regions of Canada, a physiotherapist may initiate therapy in one location, but the patient may require follow-up in another. In such cases, it may be preferable to have the original physiotherapist continue to provide care, rather than transferring the patient to a new provider.

Ten provincial physiotherapy regulators have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for Cross-Border Physiotherapy. The purpose of this agreement is to enhance access to care for patients, in the best interests of patients. The agreement makes it easier for physiotherapists who are registered in one Canadian jurisdiction to obtain a certificate of registration to practice in additional jurisdictions to provide continuing care or physiotherapy services that are not otherwise available, whether the services are delivered in person or via tele-rehabilitation.

Circumstances under which care may be delivered pursuant to the MOU

1. Where the physiotherapist began care in one jurisdiction and will offer follow-up care in another.
2. Where the patient would otherwise not be able to obtain care because there is a shortage of appropriate physiotherapy care available in the region or jurisdiction in which the patient ordinarily resides.

Circumstances under which care may NOT be delivered pursuant to the MOU

1. Where there is no demonstrable patient need for tele-rehabilitation because appropriate and suitable in-person care would otherwise be available.
2. Any other circumstances where it appears that the provision of care is in the physiotherapist's best interests but the patient might benefit equally or more from care from a local provider.

¹ Strengthening Rural Canada: Fewer and Older: Demographic and Population Challenges Across Rural Canada, A Pan-Canadian Report; CIHI Physiotherapist Data Tables 2015.

² Tele-rehabilitation refers to the provision of physiotherapy services which involves communication with a patient who is remotely located from the primary physiotherapist providing service. It can include mediums such as videoconferencing, email, apps, web-based communication, wearable technology.

General Expectations:

1. The physiotherapist will have a business address in the primary jurisdiction (that is, the jurisdiction in which he or she carries a full certificate of registration).
2. The expectations defined in provincial or territorial Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics apply regardless of whether services are provided via tele-rehabilitation or through in-person patient interactions. [Refer to the [Practice Standards](#), Guidelines and Advisories found on our website as well as the related [Legislation](#)].
3. Physiotherapists must use professional judgement to determine if tele-rehabilitation is an appropriate modality to deliver services to the patient. This evaluation should be made on a case-by-case basis with selections based on patient condition and preference, available technology, risks and benefits.
4. Ensure that tele-rehabilitation does not expose the patient to greater risk than other possible service delivery methods. This can include risks to the privacy of the patient's health information or safety depending on the physical environment.
5. Ensure competence in using the technology. The physiotherapist must understand the system's capabilities and limitations and have technology support available if needed. The physiotherapist is responsible for assuring the technological proficiency of those involved in the patient's care. The physiotherapist must also ensure that the patient has suitable access to and competence with the technology.
6. When providing tele-rehabilitation across provincial borders, the physiotherapist must hold an appropriate certificate to practice in the jurisdiction from which he or she provides the care and the jurisdiction in which the care is received.
7. When providing care across provincial borders the physiotherapist must inform the patient of the process to follow if they have a concern or complaint about their physiotherapy care.

Consent Issues:

1. In delivering tele-rehabilitation services, the physiotherapist must verify the identity of the client, the provider and any support personnel involved. Document the verification policy and processes used.
2. The physiotherapist should augment routine informed consent processes as required to support tele-rehabilitation or cross border care delivery.
 - a. Patients should be made aware of any limitations that tele-rehabilitation service present as compared to an in-person encounter for that patient's situation, such as the inability to perform hands-on examination, assessment and treatment.
 - b. Consent should be obtained for videotaping, recording or storing information and data from the tele-rehabilitation session; for the transmission of information via tele-rehabilitation technologies, and for the participation of other health care providers or the patient's family in the provision of care.

Privacy Requirements:

1. The physiotherapist must ensure compliance with all privacy and security requirements both during tele-rehabilitation sessions and when in contact with the patient through other electronic means, such as arranging appointments via email. Document privacy and security measures. Consider topics such as authentication and encryption technology, secure transmission systems and storage mechanisms.
2. Written policies and procedures should be maintained at the same standard as in-person encounters for documentation, maintenance, and transmission of the records of the encounter using tele-rehabilitation technologies.
3. The physiotherapist should ensure that there are guidelines in place to ensure that patient records cannot be accessed by unauthorized users, tampered with or destroyed and are protected at both the originating and remote sites.
4. The physiotherapist must take the necessary action to ensure the security of all devices used in tele-rehabilitation and when storing information related to tele-rehabilitation services.
5. The physiotherapist must be aware of any employer policies for privacy and security for the use of tele-rehabilitation as a treatment modality.

Safety Considerations:

1. The physiotherapist must have a safety protocol in place in the event of an emergency or adverse event.
2. There must be an alternative method of contacting the patient and the patient should be provided with an alternate way of contacting the physiotherapist. For example in the case of internet failure, the physiotherapist must be able to telephone the patient.
3. The physiotherapist must ensure access to appropriate technical support for trouble shooting in the event of difficulty with the technology. It is also recommended that all technologies are trialled prior to patient appointments to ensure good functioning of the system.