

Digital Tools Case Study

Quick intro to yourself and any contact details you're happy to share ...

Andy Curtis - Clinical Director for The Medical Group. Leading multidisciplinary teams across 21 clinical sites, through the South of England. Extended Scope Physiotherapist, specialising in Sports and Orthopaedic Medicine.

What physio services do you provide? (e.g. specialty, conditions, location, patient demographics)

Musculoskeletal and Neuromuscular Physiotherapy. We have an extensive team of physios from newly qualified to regional leads, working through Bristol, Bath, Newport, Reading, Didcot, Cheltenham and Bournemouth. As a result we work with a wide spectrum of conditions from sports and work related injury, to long term conditions, medicolegal cases, growth development issues and home visits for mobility or independent living needs.

What tools are you using to deliver your physio services digitally?

We have used several exercise prescription and video consultation platforms over the recent years but have currently settled on using TeleHab from VALD. This is a platform we were introduced to as we also use VALD's HumanTrak system in clinic for 3D motion and biomechanical assessment, and have found it to be intuitive, simple to initiate a video consultation and can easily move through to program builder to send home exercise plans following either a virtual or face to face session.

How have these services replaced face to face contact?

We have used virtual sessions previously for patient preference, as a follow up or progression session, but currently it has become more readily used for the 'virtual first' aspect of our COVID-19 workflow. TeleHab has allowed us to effectively manage many cases entirely virtually, and make the reasoned decision to complete a face to face session without risk to the patient or team member.

What is the clinician's experience of using the digital tools?

Overall very positive, but it's not like working directly with a patient. Healthcare is very humanistic, and requires trust and rapport, which seems to be a little longer in developing through virtual means. However, once built, the blend of virtual and face to face is very effective. Also, with App based exercise prescription being more informative and interactive, patient adherence seems to be up too – it helps being able to track their progress via the app, making them a little more accountable than the offline methods do! It is more difficult to complete thorough assessment, for obvious reasons, via virtual consultation, but generally where there is a will there is a way! Physio is about problem solving after all.

Do you have any patient feedback on digital physio service offer?

It seems to be a real mixed bag. For the type of patients we would have used it with pre COVID – a follow up call or a progression sessions – it is well received. For many though, they prefer the face to face or hands on approach; either through fear of new technology, because it's what they are used to or because they get a greater perceived pain modulation. Patients do always seem very grateful when they can see you face to face, but it appears that patient experience of the virtual system of choice has a fair amount to do with this. Through using TeleHab patient experience has been of a level we have seen little push back when it has been required, but conversely we have seen a fair amount of push back from referral companies not funding cases if they are seen fully virtually, so more work is needed to bridge that gap if we are to ever get the most from a digital healthcare solution.

Any top tips to others exploring using digital tools in physio services?

Use a system that minimises the time wastage during a session. Some platforms have a convoluted process of going from appointment time, to consultation invite to starting the consultation. The more well thought out platforms are slick at this, and this is one reason we opted for the TeleHab system. Ensuring simple workflow but within data security requirements is the key to good user experience, I think. Also look into how the aftermarket support is. TeleHab has a really in-depth exercise library, but on occasion, when something bespoke we would like to use is not there, or not easily searched for, we have had the support on hand to complete an effective patient outcome regardless.