



Telehealth and Physical Therapists: Patients Recognize the Value

Private payers have shifted their payment policies to encourage patients to access physical therapists via telehealth. While many of these shifts have been welcome news, it is imperative that these policies be maintained in order to address the needs of patients by improving access to physical therapy both during and after the pandemic.

During the COVID crisis, payers have implemented some flexibilities for physical therapists to provide vital healthcare services via telehealth, but the patient experience of telehealth can be vastly different from in-person care. Do patients recognize the value of physical therapy provided via telehealth?

Data collected during the first months of the pandemic is streaming in, and proves that the answer is a resounding yes:

- One [study](#) from FOTO (Focus on Therapeutic Outcomes, Inc.) analyzed 4000 episodes of care administered using telehealth. The study looked at 4 levels of intensity and used a propensity scoring method to simulate a randomized controlled trial. Patient satisfaction was equal for in-person care and care administered via telehealth. Beyond patient satisfaction, both telehealth and face-to-face care were equally effective for improving functional status. In addition, episodes of care involving telehealth had an average of 2-3 fewer visits.
- In one [survey](#), telehealth patient satisfaction (95%) was recorded to be nearly as high as in-clinic patient satisfaction (97%). The PT practice's Net Promoter Score (NPS) rose from its pre-COVID historic average of 87 to 91 by the middle of June.
- Another [published report](#) shows preliminary evidence suggesting the adoption of telerehab in lieu of face-to-face interventions is beneficial for reducing pain and improving physical function in patients afflicted with chronic nonmalignant musculoskeletal pain from low back pain, lumbar stenosis, neck pain, and osteoarthritis.
- At a large urban academic medical center [tracking](#) 4548 physical therapy sessions, 94% of patients reported they were satisfied with the 85% of the sessions conducted via telehealth.
- In an online [survey](#) of 205 participants, "excellent" or "very good" responses were reported by the respondents for all patient-centered outcome metrics (ranging 93.7-99%) and value in future telehealth visit (86.8%) across telerehabilitation visits. Respondents also reported other benefits included eliminating travel time, incorporating other healthcare advocates, and convenience delivering care in a familiar environment to patients who were children.

Patient Voices

*"It was all so effective," ...
"The client portal is a critical part, too. She put in all the exercises accompanied by descriptions and videos. All I had to do was sign into my portal and do my PT."*

- [Lynn R., PT telehealth patient](#)

"Telehealth is much more convenient for my schedule so I don't have to drive, which is straining on my injury."

- [PT Telehealth survey respondent](#)