

PHYSICAL THERAPISTS' PERCEPTION AND UTILIZATION OF DIGITAL REMOTE PHYSICAL THERAPY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE PHILIPPINES: AN ONLINE CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of COVID-19 in the Philippines disrupted traditional physical therapy rehabilitation and introduced the alternative system of digital rehabilitation in order to maintain the delivery of health services within established health and safety protocols. Physical therapists (PTs) perceived utility as a vital predictor of acceptance and present and future use of this platform. This study describes and correlates the perception and utilization of physical therapists in the Philippines of digital remote physical therapy during this period. An adapted cross-sectional questionnaire was distributed among members of the Philippine Physical Therapy Association (PPTA) via an online link and in-person recruitment in hospitals and clinics. The 23-item survey was subdivided into the following sections: demography, perception, and utilization of digital remote physical therapy. Demographic variables were described through their frequency and percentage. Statements in the rest of the section were scored using a 5-point Likert scale, averaged for a corresponding verbal interpretation, and ranked. The Pearson correlation method determined the relationship between perception and utilization. The majority of the respondents (n=60) were female (60%), between the ages 26-30 years old (41.67%), and worked as a physical therapist for 1-5 years (50%). The participants of the study had a total of 60 physical therapists in the Philippines who practiced digital remote (60% female, the majority drawn from the age range of 26-30 years old, with mean working experience of 1-5 years). Physical therapists in the Philippines were found to have a neutral perception of digital remote physical therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic ($\mu=2.67$), showing they rarely utilized digital technology, and by extension practiced digital remote physical therapy, during the COVID-19 pandemic ($\mu=2.31$). There is a strong correlation between the physical therapists' level of perception and utilization of digital remote physical therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that whether the perception level is high or low, the level of utilization will be the same. In this case, it was found that physical therapists in the Philippines exhibited a low degree of perception and therefore a low utilization. The extent of its practical application was decidedly substantially limited in a majority of patient management and services, therefore marking the low indication of its overall utilization.

Keywords: Digital physical therapy, Remote physical therapy, COVID-19 pandemic, Perception, Utilization