

Case Study



Telemedicine: A tool for the rehabilitation and socialization of stroke patients in remote communities

There is no difference in the treatment outcome between an in-person versus telemedicine physiotherapy session.

Twenty years ago, when physiotherapist Denise Taylor began practicing, stroke clients released from hospital to their homes in distant communities were on their own. Follow-up and assistance with rehabilitation and socialization were just not available. In 2002, she participated in a small research project to test the efficacy of videoconferencing as a tool to provide that missing support.

That first study led to a three-year trial, which determined there is no difference in the treatment outcome between a stroke specific self-management program conducted in person. The results were life-changing for Denise and her clients.

***Telemedicine Applied:
OTN's secure telemedicine network is
the backbone of remote client care for
St. Joseph's Care Group.***

Based in Thunder Bay, St. Joseph's supports clients in communities that are scattered across an area the size of France. When Denise is involved in developing new programs, she explores the possibility of delivery by videoconferencing.

"Without telemedicine remote physiotherapy clients would not have support."

Without telemedicine remote physiotherapy clients would not have support that greatly improves their recovery. "Facilitating a support session that has a videoconferencing element is harder than an in-person session. It takes extra energy," according to Denise. "We do it," she says, "because there is no other option."



***The Bonus:
Clinical placement students from the
Northern Ontario School of Medicine
are introduced to telemedicine***

(Physiotherapy) Learners from the Northern Ontario School of Medicine Northern Studies Stream and Rehabilitation Studies Programs are introduced to telemedicine while participating in clinical learning experiences. Denise shares her telemedicine expertise with these learners, allowing them to gain hands-on experience as they prepare themselves for a career in physiotherapy in which telemedicine is the norm.

Telemedicine is the norm for career physiotherapists.

Denise estimates that 75% of her clients are already familiar with telemedicine, if not through practical experience, through the experience of acquaintances. She noted that telemedicine is often the only access to specialized care for remote First Nations communities.

Currently most telemedicine rooms in her area are located in local hospitals or Family Health Team facilities, where the competition for access to telemedicine space is significant. If Denise had unlimited financial resources, she would equip senior citizens and community centres with telemedicine studios, where there is so much existing geriatric-focussed activity. She believes that the socialization of stroke clients in those locations versus hospital sites would have even more positive results.

Advice to New Users:

Denise notes that for the 25% of her clients who may be unfamiliar with telemedicine, the first session can be awkward. She explains that some will seek reassurance that she can actually hear their comments in real time, as if she were in the room with them.

It is the ability to see and hear clients in real time coupled with their ability to see and hear the session facilitator that makes telemedicine effective. New users should consider the room in which the activity takes place as merely an extension of the room in which the in-person clients are participating.



Denise Taylor, PT, MPH, BScPT

Denise Taylor is a physiotherapist at St. Joseph's Care Group in Thunder Bay, Ontario. She has been involved with the Moving on after Stroke telemedicine program, Sandy Lake Stroke Prevention and the Stroke Recovery Network videoconference series in addition to working clinically in neurological rehabilitation. Denise is an advocate for people in the north, committed to breaking down geographical barriers with the use of technology. She completed her Master of Public Health Program at Lakehead University in 2010 and continues to teach physiotherapy students in the Northern Studies Stream partnership between McMaster University and Northern Ontario School of Medicine.





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