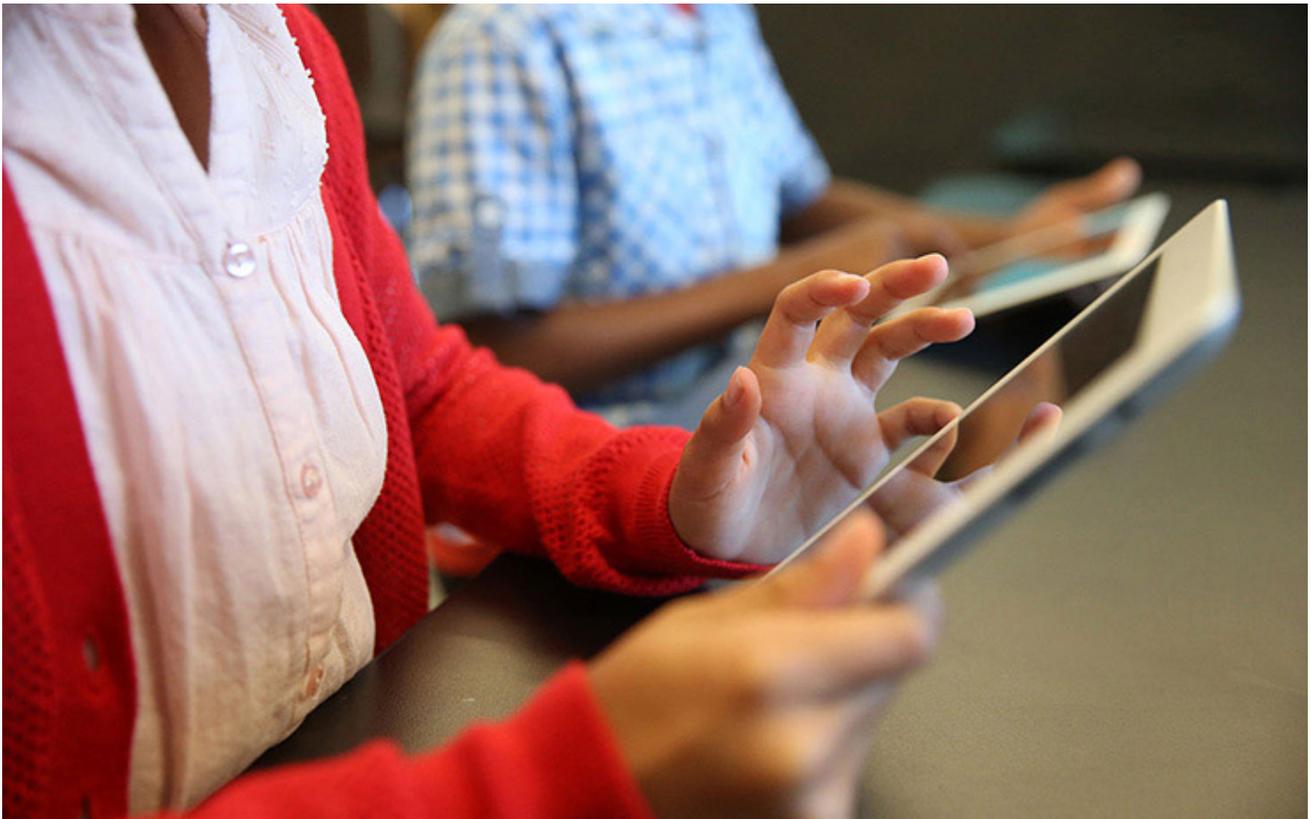

Introduction to Telehealth

The future of rehabilitation



Global Therapy Consultants

Tracey L. Davis, MOT, OTR/L

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| What is Telehealth? | 4 |
| Benefits and Challenges | 6 |
| Getting Started | 8 |
| For More Information | 9 |
| About the Author | 10 |

Introduction

By now most people have at least heard of the use of technology in the field of medicine. Many have even had personal experience with it or known someone who has. For the rehabilitation field, a lot of confusion surrounds the topic. After all, how can a therapist whose job it is to work hands on with a client complete the same tasks virtually?

If the idea of speech, occupational, or physical therapy over a computer leaves you scratching your head, this book is for you. If your child's school uses a telehealth therapist and you find yourself wondering how it works, this book is for you. If you are a therapist intrigued by the idea of seeing your clients virtually, this book is for you.

Introduction to Telehealth is a basic resource designed to paint a broad stroke picture of this innovative field, identify the types of clients appropriate to receive telehealth services, and give some ideas of how one can get started as a telehealth therapist or client.

For more specific questions or to receive more in depth training, contact Tracey Davis, founder of Global Therapy Consultants: admin@globaltherapyconsultants.com.

What is Telehealth?

Clearing up some misconceptions

Telehealth, telepractice, telemedicine, and telerehab are all terms used by both therapists and clients providing virtual therapy services. The American Occupational Therapy Association, AOTA, prefers the term telehealth to describe all therapy services utilizing technology in some way. In 2011 telehealth was identified as an emerging niche, and in 2013 AOTA released a position paper citing telehealth as a viable service delivery model : <http://ajot.aota.org/article.aspx?articleid=1853066>

While all of the terms above have been used to describe virtual therapy, telehealth most accurately encompasses the scope of services that utilize modern technology in its delivery.

Types of Telehealth Therapy Sessions

Because the range of telehealth is so wide, it would be more beneficial to provide some specific examples of what a telehealth therapy session could entail.

- ▶ Direct school based session using an e-learning platform
- ▶ Teleconference consultation session with rehab team and client
- ▶ Use of apps to monitor a home exercise program
- ▶ Small group session using secure video connection

In the above scenarios, basic therapy activities are combined with innovative technology to provide a highly effective therapy session. The amount of technology utilized will vary depending on a client's needs and abilities.

It is not necessary for every session to be conducted fully online in order for it to be considered telehealth. However, the telehealth service delivery model uses technology as an integral part of therapy. It encompasses much more than simply playing a game on the computer. Rather, the technology is utilized in such a way as to make it an indispensable tool or the basis on which the entire session is built.

Ideal clients and contraindications

Although clients in rural or underserved areas could benefit most, nearly every population group can benefit from telehealth services. Ideally, a client should be able to follow instructions and easily access the internet. If working with a child or with a person with cognitive impairments, it would be helpful for another adult to be with the client to assist during the session.

With a little ingenuity, therapy sessions can be adapted to the virtual world. However, some clients might not work well in telehealth. These could be clients with severe cognitive or behavioral issues or those needing specialized hands on treatment techniques.

Transport to therapy has always been a factor for clients. Weather, access to public transportation, ability to drive, and reliance on others can concern both patients and their families. By utilizing technology that most people already have in their homes or schools, these concerns are no longer relevant. And while it is true that some clients will need another adult to assist during therapy, this often turns into an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Instead of a parent or caregiver watching or hearing about therapeutic activities, he is able to actually participate in the session, allowing for increased understanding of the therapeutic process, resulting in improved carryover throughout the week.

Telehealth is necessarily built on a spirit of true collaboration, which is the ideal scenario for an allied health professional. With this collaborative process, therapists can turn the focus to a wellness lifestyle, aligning a client's goals and the path to take to reach those goals.

Benefits and Challenges

The best and worst of telehealth

Benefits

The benefits of telehealth are numerous and should be taken into serious consideration when evaluating whether telehealth would work for a specific client. Those benefits may include:

Easier Access

- ▶ As mentioned previously, telehealth's main benefits are access to therapy for rural and underserved populations and the collaboration effect between caregivers and therapists. These two benefits alone make it worthwhile to at least consider if a client is appropriate for services. Telehealth flattens the world, so to speak, and many clients prefer it over live services.

Cost Effectiveness

- ▶ Additionally, virtual therapy services can benefit the provider as well. The virtual service delivery model is rather cost effective, especially when a company or school must share a therapist's time between locations. Telehealth eliminates the need to drive from site to site, allowing more time to be spent with clients and less time packing up materials, driving, and transitioning to a new setting. Therapists often cite this as a benefit as well, with less wasted time during the day allowing for higher productivity with less effort.

Improved Outcomes Measures

- ▶ Although research is ongoing, current results indicate outcomes measures equal to or greater than live therapy. This could be related to the collaborative effort mentioned previously, or to the greater productivity of the therapists. Regardless, improved outcomes measures are a win-win for everyone involved.

Higher Motivation

- ▶ Let's face it, most people have at least a basic understanding of simple technology. Grandmothers all over the globe are learning how to video call their grandchildren, and the current generation does not know a world without technology. The use of video conferencing and apps can be highly motivating to many people, especially if it eliminates the need to drive to therapy each week.

Challenges

With any innovative field comes challenges associated with it. Telehealth is no exception. Below are the main areas that can prove frustrating or that need to be addressed when using this service model:

Technology

- ▶ Yes, you read that right. Technology is amazing. Until it isn't. That is to say, the use of technology can sometimes cause more trouble than it is worth. Internet issues, computer difficulty, audio trouble...when it isn't working, most therapists and clients find themselves wishing for the good ole days of two people seated across from one another, paper and pencil and all low tech equipment.

Converting Activities

- ▶ While high tech tools are super cool, sometimes you just need to do some shoulder stability exercises. Or balance a checkbook. Or cook a meal. Many activities can be adapted to the virtual world, but it is sometimes difficult to figure out how to do just that. Regardless, this particular challenge is overcome with a little resourcefulness and ingenuity.

Multisensory Experiences

- ▶ This challenge is particularly difficult for therapists who have come to rely on setting the right environment for a client. Obviously one cannot virtually control the lighting, sounds, or smells in a client's space. However, this challenge is an educational opportunity for further collaboration to teach the whys and hows of setting the right environment can positively affect a therapy session.

Equipment Needs

- ▶ Because virtual therapy is done in someone's class or home, they must have their own set of equipment for use during therapy. Oftentimes OT can be done with very little equipment, or just utilize everyday objects. However, a lay person might not think of how common household items can be used therapeutically. This is once again a great opportunity for some education and collaboration - a simple equipment list given to clients would be a great start.

Lower Motivation

- ▶ Just as some people are highly motivated by the use of technology, others find their motivation lacking. High tech solutions can be daunting for some, especially those who have little experience. It is important to find the balance between teaching just enough to make a client comfortable, without overwhelming him or her.

Chapter 3

Getting Started

Sign Me Up!

After reading through this brief introduction, perhaps you have decided this is exactly the challenge you have been seeking. Or perhaps you are a client in need of a therapist, and you are intrigued by the solution. Whatever the case, wanting to pursue telehealth and actually starting are very different things. Options are available, but it may take some research and planning. Below are a few ideas to get you started:

Equipment

The minimum equipment necessary for occupational therapy includes a computer, internet, headset with microphone, and external moveable camera. This is important if you want to demonstrate a whole body exercise and need the camera focused in a different place. Most clients will also need another adult to assist, at least in the beginning.

Therapists

1. **Subcontract with a telehealth company:** A few companies exist which are solely in the business of telehealth. Most fill school contracts, so if you love school based therapy, this solution might suit you well. Most of these companies have their own virtual platforms with dedicated tech support and product development teams, so while the pay might not be what you are hoping for, the support for a newbie could make up the difference.
2. **Add virtual clients to your private caseload:** If you already run a private practice, look through your current caseload to identify potential candidates for telehealth. You'll need a secure platform to conduct your sessions - Skype is NOT HIPAA compliant. A basic free alternative would be a program called VSEE, which uses half the bandwidth of Skype and is HIPAA compliant. It requires the download of a program the same as Skype, but it is free and fairly straightforward to use.

Clients

1. Contact [Global Therapy Consultants!](http://GlobalTherapyConsultants.com) We work with private clients, schools, and clinics to provide consultative, evaluative, and direct therapy services. Email Tracey at admin@globaltherapyconsultants.com to discuss how GTC can meet your needs.

For More Information

Global Therapy Consultants offers more in depth trainings utilizing webinar technology, live classes, and mentoring sessions. Topics include telehealth, dyslexia, adoption and sensory issues, and homeschooling with special needs.

Visit www.globaltherapyconsultants.com or contact Tracey at admin@globaltherapyconsultants.com to schedule a consult or mentoring session today.

About the Author

Tracey L. Davis, MOT, OTR/L is a US trained pediatric occupational therapist with 17 years experience treating birth-18. She has worked in many different settings, from NICU to specialty clinics to schools and hospitals. Tracey currently owns and operates Global Therapy Consultants, providing live and telehealth consultative and direct services to clients and therapists around the world.

Tracey is available for live trainings and mentoring sessions. She can be reached at admin@globaltherapyconsultants.com. Visit www.globaltherapyconsultants.com for more information on GTC.