

Using patients' preferred platform to deliver consultations in a MSK private practice

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

My name is Helen Preston. I am Clinical Director of Prestons Health.

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

Prestons Health is an independent healthcare provider in the Peterborough and Oundle area, established in 1969, with a range of different therapists and therapies addressing mainly, but not exclusive to, MSK disorders. Our prime focus is on helping patients live well.

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

We are now using a programme called Rehabguru to use their virtual platform. This is working well and enables a link to be sent to the patient so we don't have to exchange personal information. We can also screen share exercises on this platform and use it to send exercises afterwards

We have used several tools depending on the needs and preferences of each patient. So far we have delivered consultations using WhatsApp, FaceTime, Zoom, Skype, telephone and a paid for platform (available for a 1 week free trial currently) called CoviU. We continue to innovate and try options that are patient-centred.

How have these services replaced face to face contact?

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 99% of our appointments were face to face. We had just started trialing video consultations due to national interest in our service. The service is not changing, just the medium by which we deliver care. Our reception contact patients to offer them a remote consultation. We send patients information on how the consultation will work and offer choice on the platform used to put patients at ease. For people who aren't confident with technology, we offer telephone consultations. We also offer a free 15 minute video chat so patients can try out the virtual experience prior to booking. As the pandemic eases, and the lockdown is relaxed, we are looking at ways we can lend patients devices should they not have accessibility to them so we can deliver virtual consultations to those in most need.

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

In general, they are really easy to use for both us and the patient. The most important factor so far has been the consistency and quality of the internet connection. Remote consultations are very dependent on the patient having a good line.

I have found that the time post-treatment for me to ensure the patient has all the information has been quite notable, hence the use of the Rehabguru programme has been helpful to collate information into a palatable and professional form for the patient to self-monitor and refer to the information.

The thing I've really noticed so far is that patients are now more willing to embrace empowered healthcare than often we find in private practice face to face consultations. Because we cannot perform

passive therapies such as manual therapy, acupuncture or electrotherapy, their expectations are different. They know this cannot be delivered via a virtual consultation and thus are appearing more open to creating their own agency around their condition.

I think that 95% of what I would do normally with a person face to face is possible through virtual consults. The final 5% I can't needs to be considered e.g. reflex testing, motor testing, special tests for the client group that needs that doing. Although often I feel that I don't physically need to touch the patient to see what's going on, some people have a perception that this is required. Normally this is where hands on would work well as you could feedback your findings having actually touched them.

It will be interesting to see what cohort of patients remote consultations have good outcomes in. I suspect a certain cohort of around 5% may have poorer outcomes but this is anecdotal at present. It will be interesting to consider which patients do need face to face as the lockdown does start being relaxed and some form of screening can happen to highlight these to MSK providers (whether NHS or private).

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

"Linking in on my iPad was simple. I received great advice with future support from an experienced professional. I didn't feel like I had missed out for not being face to face".

We are evaluating each interaction via a free to access google form that we have designed after every consultation to gain valuable real time feedback we can act on after each interaction.

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

Don't be afraid to try new things. I have been in awe of our patients and their willingness to embrace a new way of working. They love the innovation too!

Allow plenty of time between appointments to allow for any tech issues during the consultation and therefore giving patients a real sense of value of their time with you.

Maintain professionalism. I've been conscious to wear my usual uniform when doing the consult. Make sure the environment the patient can see looks as safe and welcoming as a treatment area.