

Training physiotherapists in psychologically informed practice using a novel online approach

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Purpose: Practice guidelines, including NICE, recommend delivering combined physical and psychological approaches for managing pain conditions. Research suggests that physiotherapists, whilst well placed to deliver this treatment, lack confidence and training to support the application of this approach (Denny 2020). The PPA view this as a priority area to support.

Aim: To test the feasibility of delivering an online training package for physiotherapists.

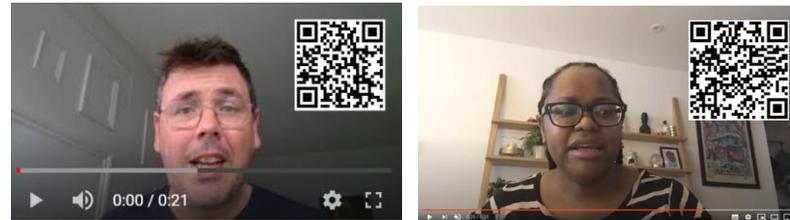
Methods: In collaboration with Professor Francis Keefe (Duke University, USA) the PPA co-designed an online training programme, based on previous published training (Keefe 2018).

Training consisted of eight sessions, each 1 hour long, delivered weekly online using tele-video platform (Zoom™). Participants were assigned home practice activities to embed learning in the sessions. 12 participants took part. All completed training.

Evaluation included asking participants to write responses to a series of video vignettes (clinical scenarios) pre and post attending the online training programme (use QR to watch examples in next column). The intention was to capture clinical practice more related to actual practice than questionnaires provide but without the ethical issues associated with filming actual clinical sessions. Nine participants completed the pre training survey and seven completed the post training survey.

Ethical Approval: for this research was obtained by Queen Mary Ethics of Research Committee (QMREC2305a).

Analysis: Textual data was inputted into NVivo 12™ and coded inductively. Overarching themes were identified to track skill development after training.



Results:

Before training, we found that participants:

- Defaulted to **acknowledging** patient attempts to complete home practice that was allocated in the previous appointment.
- Used **problem solving** as a way to manage distress.
- Spent time **eliciting beliefs** about pain and often offered biological explanations for pain.
- Attempted to identify **meaningful activities and goals**.
- Often explored **pacing activity** as a skill.

After training, we found that participants:

- Spent more time understanding difficult scenarios using **deep inquiry or functional analysis**
- Directly **engaged with distressing emotions**
- Were willing to **explore difficult tasks in the moment**
- Attended to the **patient perspective**

In general participants spent less time on pure information gathering and shifted to skills aligned to psychologically informed practice. They demonstrated skill in dealing with distress and reported increased confidence in working beyond biomedical approaches.

Conclusion(s): This online training demonstrated a change in how participants approached a variety of often reported difficult clinical scenarios.

The findings of this project have directly influenced a next phase of research looking to further develop and roll out this training. This aims to further refine the programme and provide high quality accessible training to support clinicians in applying psychologically informed approaches in their clinical practice.

The PPA are collaborating with people with lived experience, the Health Innovation Network of South London, together with Duke University, and St Georges Hospital. This project is being funded by Q Improvement Lab.

The accessible and affordable nature of this training provides a means for physiotherapists to develop their skills in this core aspect of practice. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and a switch to remote working this training, delivered using synchronous video methods, may provide opportunity, and a safe environment, for physiotherapists to practice these skills using synchronous video consultation. (Walumbe 2020)

References:

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