

Introduction

Therapy provision is critical for all students, particularly for young people with complex needs. During the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic and accompanying lockdown, traditional, face-to-face sessions moved to virtual sessions requiring use of technology, and a multidisciplinary approach in order to ensure continuation of therapy¹. All therapists (physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, music therapists), supported students and lecturers in using virtual sessions in addition to other resources². Virtual sessions provided an opportunity for interactive, 'life' participation in online lessons³ and social inclusion during isolation/shielding.

Methods

Surveys were created in Microsoft Outlook and were sent out electronically to parents and therapists. Survey questions comprised of objective and open ended questions. Responses were collated manually.

Results

Cohort: Nine therapists and 13 parents/carers responded to the survey. All therapists (n=9) resorted to conducting their sessions virtually to support students during the lockdown.

Sessions: Therapists conducted both one-to-one as well as group sessions of which group sessions were better attended (7 vs. 5). Group sessions were also preferred by students as indicated by their parents/carers (5 vs. 4).

Challenges: As shown in Fig. 1, difficulties encountered by parents/carers were related to internet connectivity, emails landing in the spam, student's lack of motivation and lack of engagement with technology (Zoom) while the rest expressed no difficulties.

Positive outcomes: Parents/carers expressed their satisfaction for the virtual sessions (Fig. 2) indicating that the sessions provided for student's routine, improved social engagement and communication skills, developed an appreciation for technology, was an opportunity to stay connected with classmates and served in continuing therapy. Therapists found it an opportunity to collaborate creatively in a transdisciplinary way providing for a huge learning experience and a possibility to build a 'toolbox' for future use i.e. to support students when absent from college.

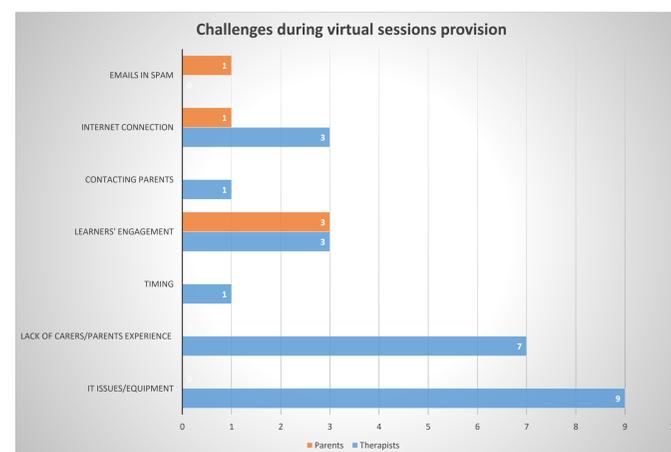


Fig. 1. Challenges expressed by 13 parents/carers (n=13) and therapists (n=9) of in carrying out group and/or virtual sessions.

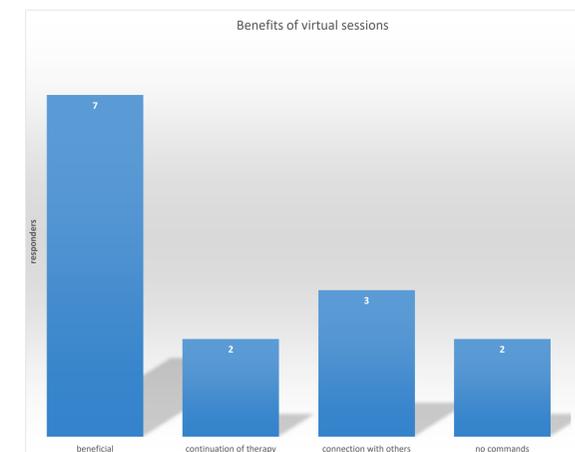


Fig. 2. Benefits of Virtual Sessions. 13 parents/carers responses of (n=13) that found the sessions beneficial.

Community referrals and community visits: Five therapists referred students for additional community team support and four therapists completed face-to-face sessions in the community during the lockdown.

Suggestions

- IT training for all involved in virtual sessions
- Setting session expectations with all parties
- Ensuring efficient device and technology availability to both therapists and students
- Orientation of parents and carers to their role in supporting online learning
- Training for parents and carers to promote transferable skills for student well being beyond college hours
- Have a clinical needs base group sessions to cater to specific needs
- Use robust outcome measures to monitor progress
- Periodic feedback from parents 13 parents and carers

Conclusions

Virtual sessions were appreciated and beneficial to support students. Technical issues experienced by therapists and lack of IT skills, management skills on the part of parents/carers were most common challenges encountered.

Key references

1. SCIE, COVID-19 guide for care staff supporting adults with learning disabilities or autistic adults, May 2021
2. Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, Covid-19: guide for rapid implementation of remote physiotherapy delivery, May 2020
3. Further education COVID-19 operational guidance, Department of education, May 2021

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Further information

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