

Journal/ paper review
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Title: A systematic review of the use of telehealth in speech, language and hearing sciences

Link: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1357633X15583215>

Aim or question:

- To investigate how SLT (and audiology) features in telehealth

Summary of methods:

- Systematic review
- Literature review of peer-reviewed papers (n=103) using Cochrane handbook guidelines (pre August 2014)
- SLP's and audiologists involved in data collection

Considerations:

- Included papers on 'hearing' – these made up the majority of papers (32.1%). May not be directly relevant to SLT role in UK
- Most papers from USA (23%) and Australia (29%)- more widely dispersed populations
- Used papers written in English or Portuguese
- Much research in this topic area is not strong
- Overlap/ differing terminology in the field makes literature searches difficult

Summary of findings:

- Telehealth can provide advantages for providing distance care according to 85.5% of papers – some papers reported it was unclear whether the telehealth procedure had advantages (13.6%)
- Only 0.9% concluded non-telehealth methods were more advantageous
- The majority of studies in telehealth focus on assessment (36.9%) and screening (8.7%)
- Telehealth methods used across all age groups
- Most studies used internet
- 'The overall results of the present systematic review indicated that telehealth activities demonstrated mainly advantages over the alternative non-telehealth approaches' p. 372

Application to practice:

- There are many barriers to telehealth- technology (more data to improve software), training, regulation, acceptance, recognition of the service method. 25% of studies did not mention barriers.
- Can be difficult to access health records, medical info that is needed.
- Ease of access reported as main advantage in 80% of papers – reduced driving time, more accessible in rural areas/ areas with lack of specialists, promotes patient centred care
- Cost effectiveness reported but only in 13% of studies
- Participants perceived remote therapy to be as valuable as direct (language)
- Participants perceived remote therapy to be as valuable as direct and was also more cost effective/ successful (speech)
- Improved access to care and cost effectiveness reported (voice)
- Improved access to care and professionals reported but consideration needed of risk (dysphagia)
- There is a need for SLPs/ audiologists to adapt to new way of working

- 'online assessment is a potentially viable, feasible and reliable service' (p. 371)
- Increased quality of care reported= convenient
- Children may need mediator to access telehealth. Need to consider age and education level .

General comments on topic:

- Technology is increasingly being used for screening, assessment intervention and health education and support for this is increasing.
- Increased access and reduced costs without having a negative impact on outcomes

Next steps for research:

- Evidence needs to underpin use of telehealth methods
- Randomised controlled trials needed to determine best practice
- Development of standards/ guidelines
- Cost effectiveness analysis

Other references/ resources to look at:

- ASHA position statement
- <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1094670516666674>
- <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1525740116680424>