

Effectiveness of online clinical mentoring on physiotherapists' clinical practice. A randomised controlled trial

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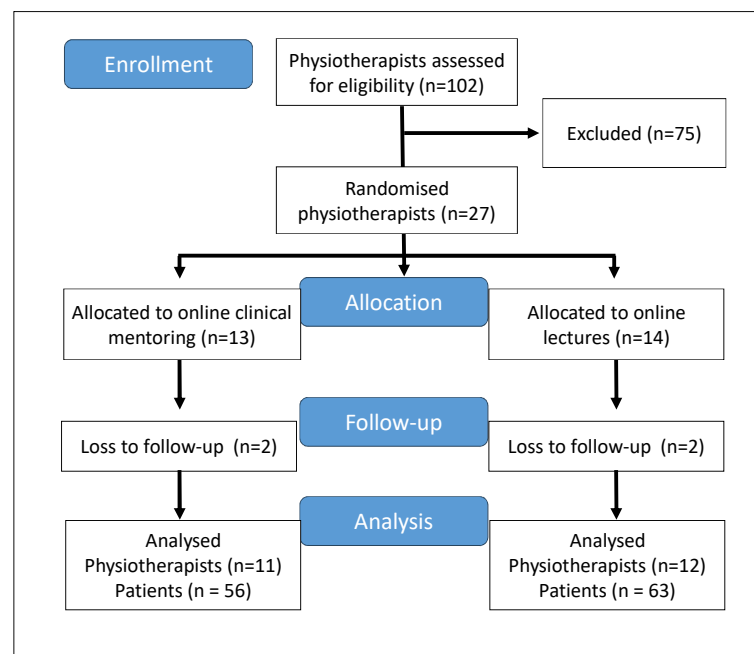
Background

Participation in continuing professional development is thought to be essential for improving physiotherapists' clinical practice and their patient outcomes. Continuing professional development with active components, such as clinical mentoring, have been shown to enhance practice, however the relative benefits of online clinical mentoring when compared to other online learning methods is unclear.

This study aimed to determine whether a short-term online clinical mentoring program was more effective than asynchronous online lectures in improving physiotherapist practice and patient outcomes.

Methods

In this randomized controlled trial, 27 physiotherapists were randomized to receive either 6 hours of online clinical mentoring (experimental group) or 6 hours of pre-recorded online lectures (control group). The primary outcome was the function of patients treated by the physiotherapists, measured using the Patient-Specific Functional Scale (PSFS) at baseline and 4-week follow-up.



	Clinical mentoring	Lectures	Linear regression model. Fully adjusted ^b		
Patients	56	63			
	Outcome mean at 4 weeks (SD) ^a		MD	95% CI	p
PSFS	7.51 (2.11)	7.56 (1.87)	0.20 ^c	-0.49, 0.89	0.49 ^c
FRI	24.87 (19.66)	28.45 (20.52)	-4.71	-12.12, 2.7	0.19
GRC ^c	2.89 (1.98)	2.89 (1.71)	0.09	-0.94, 1.13	0.85

PSFS = Patient Specific Functional Scale, FRI= Functional Rating Index, GRC= Global Rating of Change,

MD = mean difference, CI= confidence interval, p = p-value

^aMeans calculated from raw scores and unadjusted.

^bAdjusted for sex, age, symptoms duration, Orebro, area of symptoms, compensation.

^cNo baseline score to adjust for.

^dPhysical therapist unable to be included as random factor in this analysis.

Results

Twenty-three physiotherapists and 119 patients completed follow-up. No significant between-group differences were found for the primary patient outcome (PSFS MD = 0.02, p 0.49). Physiotherapists in the experimental group showed no greater improvement in confidence (MD = -2.17, p = 0.52) or self-reflection (MD = 3.66, p = 0.19) compared to the control group.

Conclusion

A 6-hour online clinical mentoring program did not significantly improve physiotherapist confidence, self-reflection, or patient outcomes when compared to asynchronous online lectures. These findings may inform the design of future online clinical mentoring used for the professional development of physiotherapists and other health professionals.

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