

Sneijder, P., Stinesen, B. B., Teunissen, A., Blauw, I., Jonker, P., & Klarenbeek, A. (2023). CoPain: A learning environment for improving communication between patients with chronic pain and practitioners. ICCH Puerto Rico, 22-25 October 2023.

Introduction

Communication is described as an important professional competence for physiotherapists [1]. Although physiotherapy is concerned with patient-centered approaches, some studies suggest that its approach to communication is mostly practitioner-centered [2]. Thus, the development of communication skills in this setting deserves attention in professionalization programs. In interaction with patients with chronic pain it is specifically important to ensure active participation of patients. The pain and its related disability often result from a complex interaction of biomedical, social and psychological factors. It is important for practitioners and patients to achieve a shared understanding of the pain and these biopsychosocial factors to increase patients' functioning. Therefore, we develop a digital learning environment (CoPain) to give practitioners insight into discursive strategies that enable achieving a shared understanding [3]. In this way, CoPain contributes to patient-centered communication [4] in physiotherapy.

Educational objectives

Using empirical analyses of audio-recorded conversations in rehabilitation practice and theoretical knowledge of communication on chronic pain, CoPain aims to improve the interactional sensitivity and skills of health professionals, with a focus on 1) validating pain experiences, 2) eliciting the patients' perspective, 3) exploring whether patients are open to discuss psychosocial factors and 4) using pain education in interaction. These educational objectives have been formulated in close cooperation with physiotherapists and experts, as well as patients.

Instructional Methods

For each educational objective, we present conversation scenarios in video that are based on authentic conversations in pain rehabilitation. Participants are challenged to choose how the practitioner should respond, using a multiple choice format. Depending on the choice, the conversation continues in a particular way. Each choice is followed by feedback messages, including: (a) 'feed-back' (on present behaviour), (b) 'feed-up' (on the ideal behaviour) and (c) 'feed-forward' (for growing from the 'present' to the 'ideal' behaviour) [5].

Program evaluation results

In the next phase, once the prototype has been developed, we will test CoPain amongst the target group of practitioners who interact with patients with chronic pain on a regular basis. Depending on the results, we will refine and retest the learning environment.

Discussion/Implications

CoPain is developed in close cooperation with patients and practitioners. We conducted interviews with patients and focusgroups with practitioners, to obtain insight into educational needs and learning preferences of the target group. Both activities led to criteria with respect to the educational objectives as well as usability. With this, we aim to align with the specific needs of practitioners and increase the support base for implementation of the learning environment in physiotherapy practice. Although face-to-face learning environments may provide the opportunity for in-depth discussion, a digital learning environment can as well simulate 'real-life' situations and professionals can use it 'just-in-time' and independently of time and place. Testing the learning environment will demonstrate whether CoPain helps practitioners to shape their communication practices in

interaction with patients with chronic pain. In a later stage, we will evaluate patient satisfaction and the connection between the learning outcomes and treatment outcomes.

References

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