

eHealth Interventions to Support Self-Management:
Perceptions and experiences of People with Musculoskeletal Disorders and Physiotherapists –
'eHealth: It's TIME': A Qualitative Study



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Introduction:

There is increasing interest in the potential role of eHealth interventions to support self-management in people with musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). The COVID-19 pandemic appears to have been a significant catalyst for the implementation of eHealth modalities into routine practice, providing a unique opportunity for real-world evaluation of this underutilized method of delivering physiotherapy.

Objectives:

To explore the perceptions of eHealth-mediated supported self-management from the perspective of people with MSDs and musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapists

Methods:

A qualitative interpretive descriptive study utilising semi-structured telephone interviews was conducted within musculoskeletal physiotherapy services (public and private) in the Republic of Ireland. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results:

Table 1: Participant demographics – MSK Physiotherapists (n = 13)

Gender (male/female)	7 male / 6 female
Age range (mean)	26 – 42 (35)
Years qualified range (mean)	4 – 19 (12)
Work grade	Senior (n = 7); Clinical Specialist (n = 4) Private practitioner (n = 2)
Workplace setting*	Public hospital (n = 10); Private practice (n = 3); Primary care (n = 1)
Geographical location	Urban (n = 11)/ Rural (n = 2)
Experience of using eHealth	Pre COVID-19 (n = 7) / Since COVID-19 (n = 6)

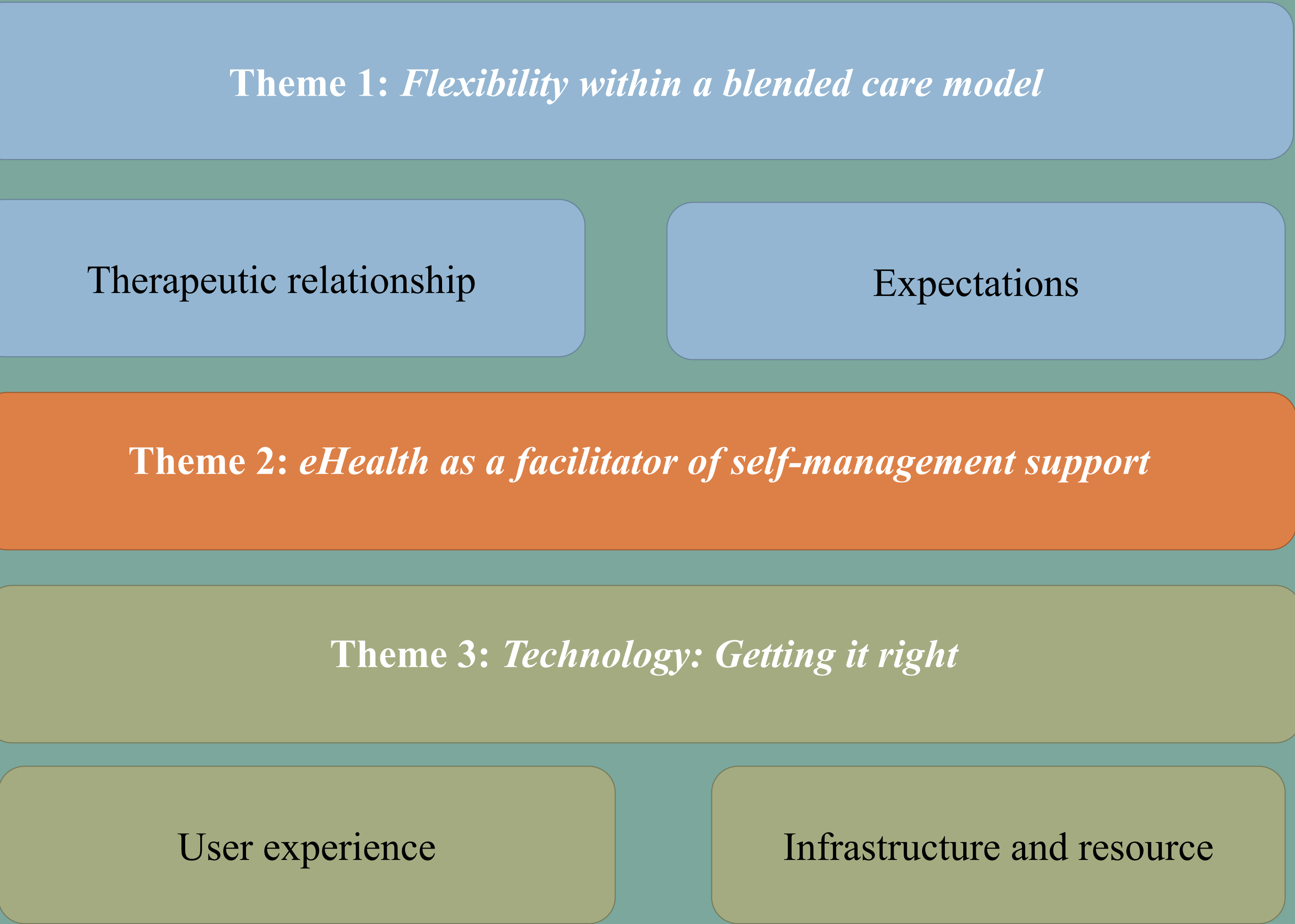
*Multiple answers possible

Table 2: Participant demographics – People with MSD (n = 13)

Gender (male/female)	4 male / 9 female
Age range (mean)	24 – 77 (58)
Location of physio*	Private practice (n = 8); Public hospital (n=4) Private hospital (n = 3); Primary care (n = 1)
Geographical location	Urban (n = 6)/ Rural (n = 7)
Higher degree/professional qualification	Yes (n = 11) / No (n = 2)
Employment status	Retired (n = 5); Full time employment (n = 5) Unable to work due to sickness/disability (n = 2); Student (n = 1)
Site of musculoskeletal problem	Lower limb (n = 5); Multiple (n = 3) Other (n = 3); Upper limb (n = 2)
Duration of symptoms	< 1 month (n = 2); 1 – 3 months (n = 3) 4 – 6 months (n = 1); 1 – 2 years (n = 1) 3 – 4 years (n = 4); > 4 years (n = 2)
Experience of eHealth within Physiotherapy	Yes (n = 8)/ No (n = 5)

*Multiple answers possible

Figure 1: Themes and Subthemes



Sample Quotations:

Flexibility within a blended care model → eHealth for follow-up

“everyone would need a physical assessment at the very start” (PMSD-D)

Flexibility within a blended care model → Flexibility is very important

“make provision for those that just don't want it and aren't interested in it... I would hate to feel that patients...aren't getting as good a quality service because they don't want that.” (PT-7)

eHealth as a facilitator of self-management support → eHealth can help support self-management

“to be able to get reminders or prompt or support when you fall off the waggoneHealth is the perfect solution to help people stay on track” (PT-3)

Technology: Getting it right → User involvement is essential

“broadband is not as good as it should be.... it can be very frustrating.” (PMSD-J)
“It's an extra three or four steps that you have to do for each patient. So, it's a little bit more

Conclusions

- Broad acceptability for facilitating follow-up self-management support
- Highlights the importance of continued user involvement in the design process

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