

Level of E-health Literacy in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat - A Survey

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: The skills and ability to access health care resources digitally is understood as E-health literacy. With the increasing use of the internet, digital devices and advancement in health care systems, the ability and need to develop E-health literacy is increased and may have a huge impact on health care providers and health care seekers in the future. This area is not yet explored, and less literature is available, hence the need of study arises. This study was aimed to evaluate the level of E-health literacy in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat. E-health literacy scale (Eheals) is a valid tool to assess the level of E-health literacy among various health care providers.

RESULT: 310 graduate students (83 males, 227 females) across the physiotherapy colleges of Gujarat filled the form and data was analysed using Microsoft excel-Windows 11 version 22H2. 75% students considered that internet is useful and important still the level of confidence to use it was found low among physiotherapy students of Gujarat state.

CONCLUSION: The level of E-health literacy is found moderate to low in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat. There is a vast scope of further studies in this area.

Keywords: E-health literacy, Health, Physiotherapy, Digitalization in health care, health

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the health care system has drastically changed worldwide and in India, especially after COVID-19. (1) Health literacy is defined by various authors. One of the largely known definitions given by Patil et al. is 'It is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions'(1). The ability to access health care resources digitally is understood as E-health literacy. With the increasing use of the internet, digital devices and advancement in health care systems, the ability and need to develop E-health literacy is increased and may have a huge impact on health care providers and health care seekers in the future. Among those with chronic health conditions, the effective use of digital health services may foster more productive physician-patient encounters. E-health literacy directly predicted increased communication self-efficacy, patient empowerment, and reduced communication apprehension (2,3) Additionally, incompetence in the same may lead to several difficulties such as failure to access the health care services, loss of health care data etc. Hence, the health care providers and health care seekers in both the population need to enhance their digital skills and E-health literacy. (2,4)

Physiotherapy is one of the leading health care professions and has a significant place in health care systems. Physiotherapy

students in the near future will be practicing in a health care profession. Hence, evaluation of the level of E-health literacy in them is important and necessary to strengthen the healthcare system. This area is not yet explored, and less literature is available, hence the need of study arises. This study was aimed to evaluate the level of E-health literacy in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat. E-health literacy scale (Eheals) is a valid tool to assess the level of E-health literacy among various health care providers. (5)

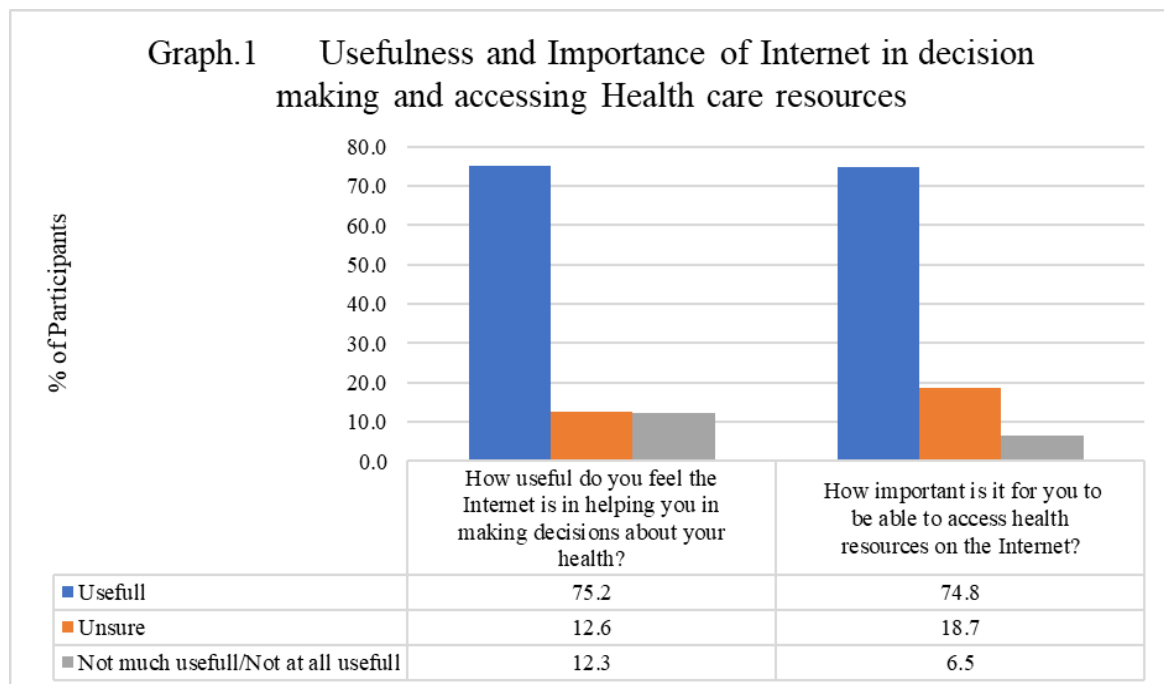
MATERIALS & METHODS

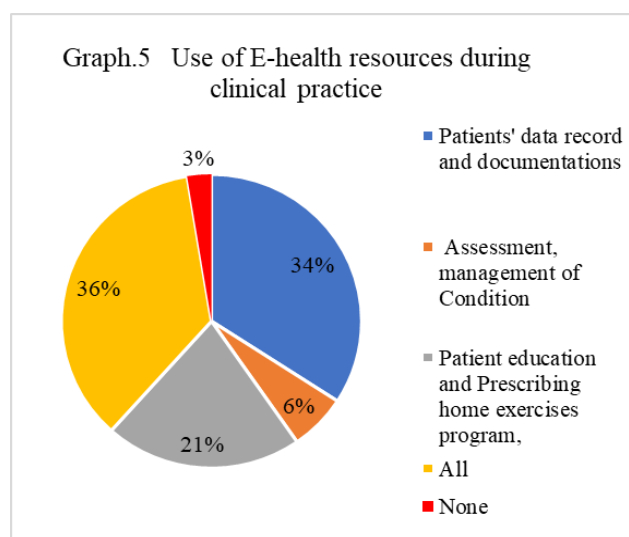
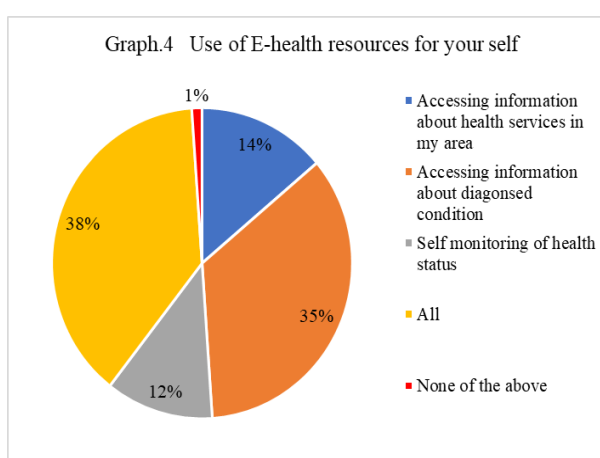
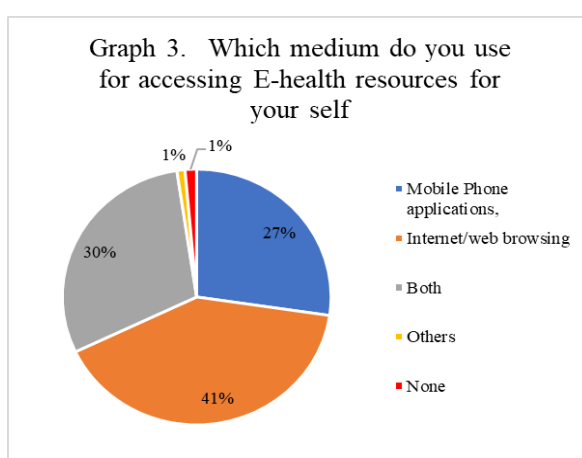
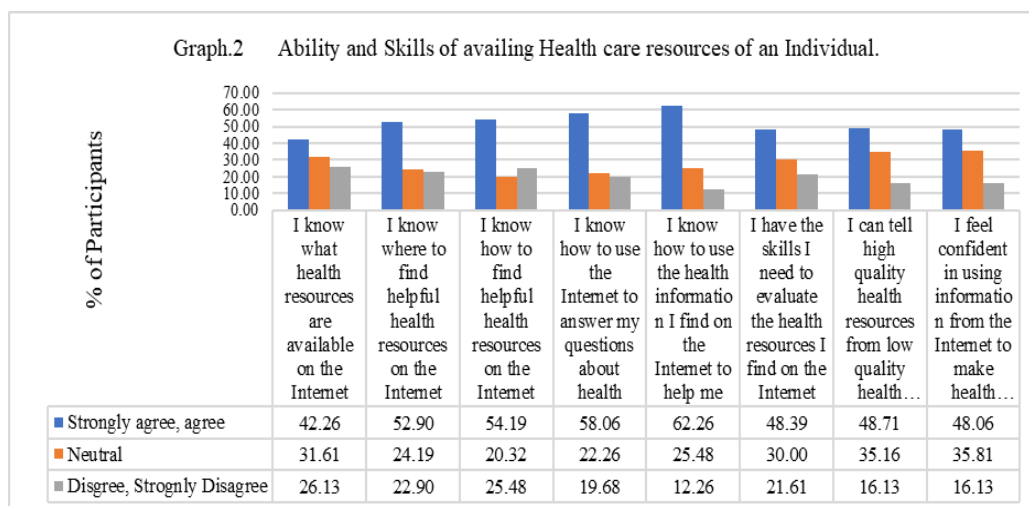
In this cross-section survey, the evaluation was circulated among all the physiotherapy colleges of Gujarat state. Total 310 graduate students (83 males, 227 females) studying in Physiotherapy filled the form. The form comprises of Eheals scale and some description of the medium used for accessing E-health resources and use of E-health resources for yourself and during clinical practice. Eheals is a self-administered questionnaire that contains ten questions about the usefulness of the internet in making health care related

decisions and the ability to access the tools to obtain that information. The respondent is supposed to choose the best suitable options from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a 5-point scale. (6,7) The questions can be broadly categorized in the usefulness and Importance of Internet in decision-making and accessing health care resources and ability and Skills of availing Health care resources of an Individual.

RESULT

In the present study, the data was analyzed using Microsoft excel-Windows 11 version 22H2. A total of 310 students participated in the survey, among which 73.2% were females and 26.8% were male. The analysis of scoring of Eheals is shown I graph 1 and 2 for usefulness and ability to access health care resources through the internet. The opinions of students about E-health care resources were taken under broadly 3 categories, such as medium used for accessing health information digitally, and ways of using digital devises for their own use and while treating patients during their clinical trainings, which are presented in graph 3,4 and 5 respectively.





DISCUSSION

In recent years, digitalization has been taking over many industries and the health care system is no exception (8). The more digitalization is significantly increasing in effectiveness and transparency in healthcare system. The accessibility and effectiveness

of a new-aged healthcare system can highly depend on skills and the ability to accommodate with digitalization of health care providers and health care the seeks both. (9–11)

In the present study, the author has made an effort to evaluate the level of the E-health

literacy in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat state through Ehealth Scale. Total 310 students across all the physiotherapy colleges across Gujarat state participated in the study. As shown in Graph 1, 75% of students believed that the internet is a useful and important tool in making decisions related to healthcare and for accessing health-related information. Despite the high percentage regarding the usefulness and importance of the internet, the ability and skills of finding and utilizing health care resources digitally was found low as shown in Graph.2. Additionally, only 48% of students were confident regarding using health care information found on the internet. Approximately 28% of students were unsure about using the internet and approximately 20% of students expressed their inability or incompetence in using internet for various purposes related to healthcare. The overall result of the Ehealth scale suggests only 52% of students have sufficient skills to use the internet or other digital tools for health care services.

As shown in Graph.3 highest students use the internet for accessing healthcare related information, following mobile phone applications and both. As shown in Graph 4 and 5 E-health resources were maximum used for accessing information about offline available health care services their area such as doctors of laboratories name, address, location, cost, appointment etc. only and not for online consultation, investigations, storing health reports etc. During their clinical training, 35% of participants use digital tools for various patient management tasks, including patients' assessment and management. These findings suggest moderate to low use of E-health resources by physiotherapy students. In the literature, not many studies have been done for health care professionals. Various research has been done about E-health in other populations of India and E-health literacy was found low. (2,10).

CONCLUSION

With emerging technology and overall digitalization, E-health literacy will become a basic need of health care providers and health care seekers. The level of E-health literacy is found moderate to low in Physiotherapy students of Gujarat. There is a vast scope of further studies in this area, such as larger population sizes, various urban and rural populations with different components and/or tools of E-health resources.

Declaration by Authors

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