

Using Virtual Therapy Post Stroke: *Perspectives from a Person with Stroke and Therapy Team*

With COVID-19, many things have changed in the world including how we support our patients through their rehabilitation. Initially Outpatient Neuro Rehab Services was shuttered. But the team rallied to bring much needed therapy services to individuals amidst all the contact restrictions imposed by the pandemic. The creativity, ingenuity and determination of the team at Trillium Health Partners' Mississauga Regional Stroke Centre engineered very effective Virtual Therapy (VT) in order to deliver rehab services. These are the reflections from Ben, a stroke survivor, his Physiotherapy Team and their Virtual Therapy experience.

1. What were your feelings about having VT?

Ben- It was a happy day when we were contacted and asked if I would consider participating in Virtual Therapy. I was fortunate that my wife was available to assist so it was an easy YES! I must add that our hopes and expectations were exceeded.

Physiotherapy Team- We had apprehensions about whether VT would work with the neurological population due to the variety of impairments that may be present (vision, movement, communication, cognition). On the other hand, we also thought VT would alleviate some barriers to participation in outpatient rehabilitation such as getting to the hospital for therapy.



With the support of Virtual Therapy provided by the Trillium Neuro-Outpatient Rehab Team, Ben went from ambulating short distances using a rollator to no aids and for longer distances using Nordic poles.

2. What was your VT experience like?

Ben- I could not wait for Mondays and Wednesdays to participate in my therapy. Time flew by; the hour felt like 5 minutes! My therapist would explain each exercise and send me photos and descriptions of exercises over email. She would ask how I felt that morning and decide if it was time to increase the number of repetitions or introduce a new exercise. My therapist's understanding and kindness made me feel comfortable admitting if something was too hard or if I could do more.

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Physiotherapy Team- Outpatient Neuro Rehab Services adapted well to VT with the patients and families feedback. Good communication between both parties was definitely key in producing positive patient outcomes. We had to bend and flex as we learned, but it has been an invaluable experience. We saw the value of VT and that VT can be an effective form of treatment for some patients. Going forward, a hybrid approach (mixture of VT and in person therapy) could meet many needs.

3. What advice would you give to other patients about VT and would you recommend VT?

Ben- Are you serious????!! Of course, I would recommend VT and not just during special circumstances like the current pandemic. IT WORKS!!! It saved us the commute and worked very well for my wife who has been working from home. We were both looking for something where we would be 100% sure that we are doing the right thing and not experimenting and putting me in danger by either doing too much or too little. The most important thing is the peace of mind that I was doing what was a good fit for my unique condition.

Physiotherapy Team- Try it!!!! There are no longer such barriers as a "snow day" or "no ride to therapy"... Virtual Therapy may not be for everyone but we learned it can be effective for some patients.



With the support of Virtual Therapy provided by the Trillium Neuro-Outpatient Rehab Team, Ben is enjoying some of his favorite past time activities.