

Digital Tools Case Study
Samson Centre for MS, Guildford.

Quick intro to yourself and any contact details you're happy to share ...

I am the lead physiotherapist at the Samson Centre for MS and have been in post for 4 years+. I've done a variety of jobs before, varying from in-patient rehab, community, lecturing, private practice and have also been part-time self-employed for 14 years. My area of interest is neurology, MS specifically and working with the members of the Samson Centre to remain active and assisting them to live well with MS. Education is an essential part of my role and I love running our 'Living Well with MS' talks and discussions. I am a qualified Pilates Instructor which I incorporate into my physio practice.

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What physio services do you provide? (e.g. specialty, conditions, location, patient demographics)

Samson Centre provides physiotherapy, exercise, and oxygen treatment for anyone living in the Guildford area with MS. Our members can refer themselves and can stay a member for as long or little as they want – some have been attending for 20 years and other dip in and out of the service as needed. I manage a team of 3 physios, 2 rehab assistants and 4 gym instructors.

What tools are you using to deliver your physio services digitally?

I decided to use Zoom for our exercise classes. The reason being was that I wanted to use something that our members maybe familiar with (or their family might be familiar with and be able to assist them in setting it up). We asked one of our volunteers to assist people through the set up if needed. For our individual face to face physio appointments, we have given the member a choice. Many people with MS use iPads / iPhone so some have found FaceTime useful. As a small charity we had to opt for an option which would be free to use and quick to set up.

How have these services replaced face to face contact?

I provided a virtual service between end of March – beginning of July. After this, staff gradually returned from furlough. We screen members and offer the most appropriate setting for them. We find virtual appointments work well for some our more able members and the gym instructors are able to deliver high quality exercise interventions through virtual means. Our older members or those with living with advanced MS, maybe with cognitive issues or visual disturbance really need to attend in real-life. We are now at a point that all our classes remain online, stretch class, hand groups, seated Pilates, standing Pilates, neurofit and meditation.

What is the clinician's experience of using the digital tools?

It's fair to say that this was completely new for all of us. If you had told me I'd be teaching classes using Zoom I would have dismissed this idea completely.

Do you have any patient feedback on digital physio service offer?

Informal feedback so far but we have a questionnaire in the making to go out over Christmas.

Positives:

- No more worries about travelling to the centre – booking transport, stuck in traffic, problems with hoists in the cars
- Do not need to book a carer or find a family member / friend to bring to the centre
- Fatigue management – able to exercise more but with less hassle
- Still remain in touch with friends at the centre
- Still have regular weekly contact with staff

- Trust in staff that they know members abilities – rather than following a video on YouTube even from a reliable source

Negatives

- Sometimes difficult to judge feedback in classes and in individual sessions
- Usual IT issues, camera angles, wifi connection, user error
- Time for staff training – less experienced staff need time and feedback
- Different teaching style required for classes online...clear demos, instructions etc.
- Admin problems, sending out class links, keeping registers up to date all takes time and need to be built in. In the long term a booking system would be helpful.

Some classes work better than others! Need to adapt classes to suit the medium...for example we have to bring our classes 'back to basics', simplify exercises to suit all and emphasis quality over quantity to ensure that everyone is working safely and no one falls during a class. Set criteria for each class – this is easier as we know our members so well.

Any top tips to others exploring using digital tools in physio services?

Don't over think it, just try it. Explain to those attending this is new to you as well and ask for feedback. I have found that people are overwhelmingly supportive and understanding that this way of working is new to us all and it takes time and practice to get it right.

Be creative...it's really good fun and opens the door to lots of opportunities. I have run a virtual Living Well with MS education session with 20 attending (usually about 6). We have a hand massage workshop planned and beginning to think about service development options for the future including setting up a support group for those living further away from the centre but would like to exercise and support from physio specialized in MS.