

New Analysis Finds Improved Health Outcomes When Virtual MSK Solutions Are Guided by a Physical Therapist



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Alexandria, Va. — A new independent evaluation from the Peterson Health Technology Institute (PHTI) found that many virtual musculoskeletal (MSK) solutions, when guided by a physical therapist, deliver clinically meaningful improvements in pain and function for people with MSK conditions.

The evidence presented in PHTI's [Virtual Musculoskeletal Solutions Health Technology Assessment](#) was based on an independent review of scientific literature. The review found that many of these virtual MSK solutions, when guided by a physical therapist, offer clinical benefits to patients that are comparable to in-person physical therapy. This combination of services also has the potential to improve access to therapy, reduce health care spending, and offer greater patient outcomes and improvements in patient pain.

The American Physical Therapy Association believes this report is a critical contribution to efforts to advance cost-effective solutions in health care. It validates the idea that early access to and use of physical therapy has the potential to lower costs and improve patient outcomes by engaging the expertise of physical therapists earlier in the episode of care. This provides an alternative to costly imaging studies, procedures, and referrals for conditions that can be managed conservatively, and alleviates other overburdened providers in the health care system.

"APTA applauds PHTI's evaluation of physical therapy solutions to treat costly musculoskeletal conditions, including for populations who have limited access to in-person physical therapy," said American Physical Therapy Association President Roger Herr, PT, MPA. "Virtual musculoskeletal solutions guided by physical therapists can help reduce overall health care costs, ease administrative burdens on physical therapists, close an access gap for millions, and deliver improved clinical outcomes for the patients under our care. APTA views this report as a call to action for payers and policymakers to enhance policies that harness the power of physical therapy through digital platforms, traditional in-person methods, and hybrid approaches."

This report confirms that physical therapy is an underleveraged, underutilized, and undervalued service in health care. Virtual musculoskeletal solutions, when led by a physical therapist, could drive needed reforms to increase delivery of high-quality, affordable, and accessible care for improved patient health.

"We know that early and regular use of physical therapy can speed the healing process and avoid other complex MSK care, such as surgery. Our findings indicate that virtual solutions represent effective treatment options that can expand the number of patients who both start and stick with physical therapy," said Caroline Pearson, executive director of PHTI. "These solutions leverage technology to efficiently and conveniently deliver services that help patients recover and avoid high-

cost care, thereby reducing overall spending. In order to realize their full potential, virtual MSK solutions should be more closely integrated with medical care and insurance benefits.”

APTA is committed to digital transparency, specifically that digital physical therapist services only be performed or directed by licensed physical therapists. To learn more about digital physical therapy, visit the [APTA Digital Health in Practice webpage](#).

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The American Physical Therapy Association represents more than 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and physical therapy students nationwide. Visit apta.org to learn more.