



2025 Guidance Document: Acceptable Practices in Virtual Musculoskeletal Care

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Purpose and Scope: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT) believes that in-person and hands-on care are foundational for managing patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions. The AAOMPT affirms that virtual health technologies for musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions may be integrated with in-person and hands-on care when the integration of virtual technologies aligns with the patient's needs, goals, and values. This guidance document aims to ensure that physical therapists who manage patients using virtual technologies (i.e., remote or online patient visits or monitoring via telehealth platforms) deliver effective care tailored to each patient's needs.

Background: The current evidence supporting the use of virtual technologies does not indicate that these technologies are superior to in-person physical therapist-led management; however, they may help facilitate certain aspects of care delivery and management, as well as access to care. The AAOMPT acknowledges that there may be instances where integrating virtual technologies is necessary, based on the patient's specific needs. In cases where the patient's needs and values lead the physical therapist to perform the initial evaluation and all subsequent patient management using virtual technologies, the ability to refer the patient, when necessary, to in-person physical therapist care must be available.

Development Process: The AAOMPT board created a charge for a task force to develop this document to provide guidance on acceptable practices in Virtual Musculoskeletal care for AAOMPT practicing clinicians. The task force members reviewed and utilized current documents from the American Physical Therapy Association, the American Academy of Family Practitioners, and the American Psychiatric Association in creating this guidance document.

Recommendations:

1. Program and Team Identity

- The physical therapist is responsible for all physical therapy-related aspects of patient/client management, including the use and, when necessary, the appropriate integration of any virtual technology.

2. Legal and Ethical Compliance

- All care must comply with individual state and federal laws, licensure rules, and telehealth regulations, ensuring that it remains within the licensed physical therapist's legal and clinical scope of practice.

3. Patient Selection and Safety

- The patient should have ability to navigate, understand, and use digital health tools.
- The patient should have reliable internet, devices, and private space for virtual visits.
- Physical therapists, in collaboration with the patient, shall determine the optimal mode of



access to physical therapist services, whether this is in-person, remote, or a combination thereof.

- In-person evaluations may be needed for complex patient cases or those requiring hands-on assessments or manual therapy interventions.

4. Appropriate Interventions for Virtual MSK Care

- When indicated, the physical therapist may prescribe the following:
 - Patient exercises
 - Patient education
 - Health coaching
 - Remote monitoring

5. In-Person Care Considerations

- In-person patient management may be required when:
 - Complex case management requires more nuanced clinical judgment or multidisciplinary coordination
 - Hands-on physical assessments are necessary
 - Manual therapy is indicated

6. Training and Competency

- Physical therapists who provide virtual MSK care will be trained in telehealth tools, remote assessments, data collection, and virtual communication skills to maximize the effectiveness of virtual MSK care delivery.

References:

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