

# Practitioners' Perspective on Computer and Tablet Use in Therapeutic Recreation Practice

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## Introduction

According to Statistics Canada, by 2050 more than a quarter of the North American population will be over the age of 60. As the Canadian population is aging, older adults are faced with the proliferation of digital technologies, including computers and tablets. That being said, the use of computers and tablets is an understudied area in therapeutic recreation, and will therefore be explored to better meet the needs of the older adult population. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted amongst therapeutic recreation practitioners who work in both clinical and community-based settings with an older adult population. Situated within grounded theory, the findings will demonstrate that the use of computers and tablets in practice can pose many challenges and barriers. However, techniques and specific program ideas have been included to encourage practitioners to continue using computer and tablets in therapeutic recreation programming.

## What is Therapeutic Recreation Practice?

"The purposeful utilization or enhancement of leisure as a way to maximize a person's overall health, well-being, and quality of life" (Robertson & Long, 2008, p.4)

- To identify strategies that will help individuals meet their goals, addressing whatever challenges and barriers they may be facing (Stumbo, 2009)
- Differentiates itself from other therapies because it "involves physical, cognitive, social or emotional activity that is freely chosen and intrinsically motivated [by the client]" (Robertson & Long, 2008, p.5)
- Encourages individuals to seek experiences that are both meaningful and autonomous
- Has a direct impact on the outcomes in both research and in practice-based settings
- Services provided out of hospital, and non-profit organizations



Retrieved from: <https://sites.temple.edu/kelleyc623/>

## Purpose

To provide an awareness of how computers and tablets are being used in therapeutic recreation practice and the challenges around program implementation in order to find ways to improve technology-based programming.

## Findings

After conducting interviews with therapeutic recreation practitioners, seven categories of challenges and barriers emerged, and are highlighted below.

### Privacy & Confidentiality Issues

"We did have a patient recently when we were in the courtyard and she was talking to someone on Face time, that's right, and she started showing the family member you know the courtyard and all of us sitting there. I was like, "No, no, no, you can't do that because of confidentiality, so that was an issue actually."



"I think specifically working in mental health, it's been a challenge. You know, and there's so many more we have to go through um, usually like the Ethics Committee and stuff, just because of the privacy issues and concerns and stuff."

### Hospital Policies Create Barriers

"Um so they're actually looking at it I guess about trying to give patients access, but we're a hospital, there's policies, there's so much stuff to like, you know. And also, we have a forensic unit, so if you say yes to a patient on geriatrics, then the forensic patients are going to be like, "Why can't I?" And then there are more issues, and so I think it is a pretty big deal."

### Lack of Financial Resources

"I think a lot of them would use it more if they had the resources available. I think money is always a big issue in our field that there's not enough."

### Lack of Time to Create New Programs

"I did get enough money for two iPads, but I thought, you know what let's try one first and ah see how it goes. And for months, and months, and months I didn't use it just cause I was too busy on the unit and ah it was just a bit crazy. I've only started using in the last few months. I need to use it more, and it's just again, more time."

### No Wi-Fi Available for Patients/Clients

"Um we do have Wi-Fi in the activity room but in the patients' rooms no. You know maybe there's one patient, if we're lucky, you know he can get the Wi-Fi. If not they have to sign up with ah you know a company to get internet use in their rooms."



Retrieved from: <http://actproject.ca/act/older-peoples-emotional-interactive-experiences-through-a-citizen-science-lens/>

### Logistical Issues During Program Implementation

"But when there is a computer problem or someone can't join us or something like it's not working for someone it's a lot of scrambling like to get and make sure its still working."

## Incorporating Computers & Tablets into Therapeutic Practice

- Provide transferable skills when teaching patients/clients how to use the computer and tablet
- Use Skype to connect patients/clients with family and friends
- Provide online support groups for patients/clients upon discharge
- Help patients/clients transition from hospital to nursing home by showing them pictures and the location using Google Maps
- Use the devices to provide simulation and motivation through the use of games on the tablet
- Do not force technology on the patients/clients
- Engage in technology if it is personally meaningful

### Programs & Activities Discussed

- Digital Book Club
- Brain HQ
- Online Discussion Groups
- Virtual Lectures
- Board & Card Games
- Luminosity
- Face Time & Skype
- Use YouTube to facilitate programs such as Exercise, Zen Tangle, Yoga, Zumba, & Music



## Conclusion

The use of computers and tablets is still new in therapeutic recreation program implementation. Technology has been identified as a leisure interest for many older adults who seek therapeutic recreation assistance. It is therefore practitioner's responsibility to teach such leisure skills, as it falls within the scope of practice. However, there are many challenges and barriers practitioners need to overcome in order to implement programs that are meaningful and provide lasting outcomes. More research is needed in regards to computer and tablet programming in therapeutic recreation, especially for program objectives that aim to enhance social connections and decrease social isolation.

### References

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