

The use of information and communication technology to support physiotherapy students

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Background

- Estimated 1 billion people online in 2005
- Social networking, consumer-related online forum discussion and multimedia on demand
- The CSP (UK) uses ICT to provide support to its members (clinical guidelines, professional practice, CPD, general information)
- In contrast, the SASP website lacks depth and breadth of content, while acknowledging the importance of support
- Problem – little evidence found on the use of ICT to support physiotherapy students in SA

Aim and Objectives

- Aim:

To investigate the use of ICT at South African universities to provide support to physiotherapy students and the experiences and perceptions of those students pertaining to the use of ICT as a means of seeking and receiving support.

- Objectives:

1. What ICT facilities available;
2. What ICT being used for;
3. Experiences and perceptions of ICT;
4. How students currently being supported;
5. Adequately prepared to access support post-graduation;
6. What differences exist?

Literature review

- Definition: the use of computers and computer software to manipulate information
- WHO, UNICEF discuss the benefits of ICT in healthcare and education
- South African government's policy on ICT in healthcare and education
- “Socially acceptable technology”

Literature review (cont.)

- Benefits of ICT in healthcare
 - Education and training (e-learning)
 - Continuing professional development (CPD)
 - Evidence-based practice (EBP)
 - Geographical and professional isolation
 - Student support

Literature review (cont.)

- Challenges facing ICT adoption
 - “Digital divide”
 - Poorly developed infrastructure
 - High costs involved
 - Poor ICT literacy
 - Lack of technical skills

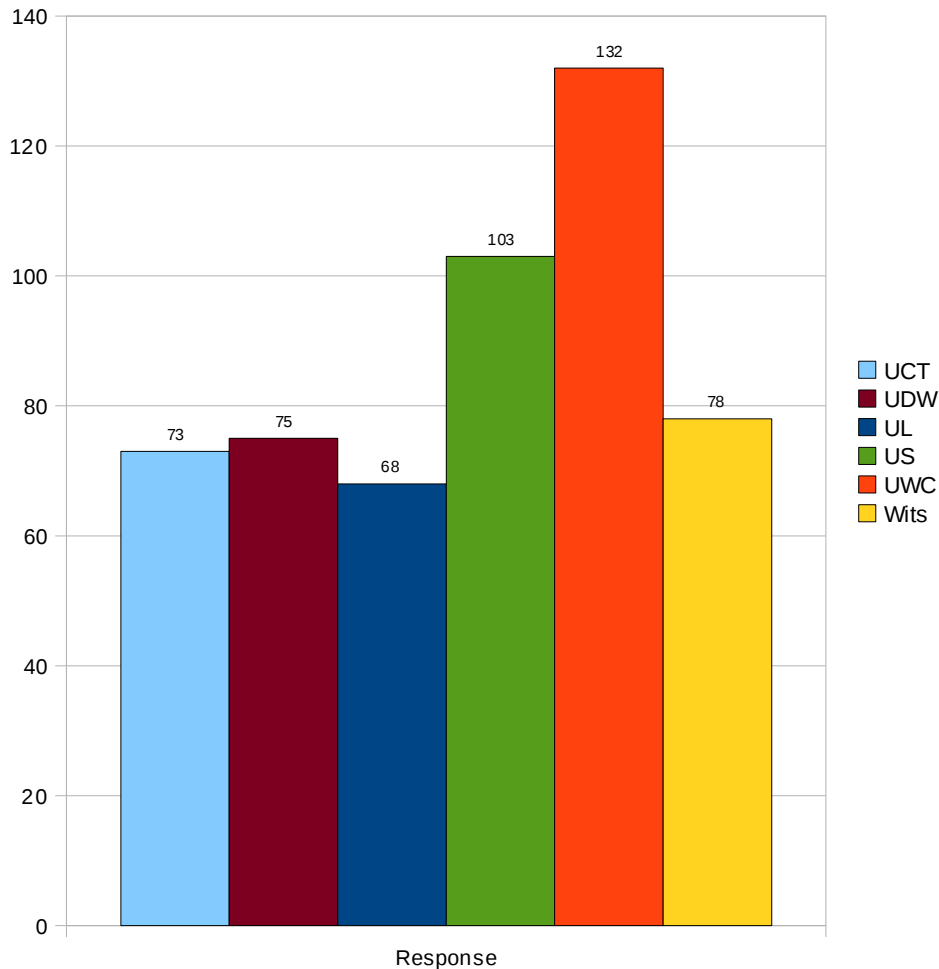
Methodology

- **Study design:** cross-sectional, descriptive survey
- **Setting:** physiotherapy departments of 6 universities offering the physiotherapy degree
- **Sample:** all undergraduate physiotherapy students
- **Instrument design:** self-developed questionnaire
- **Response rate** maximised
- **Data analysis:** OpenOffice spreadsheet and SPSS
- **Ethical clearance** obtained

Results

Demographics

- Response rate 47.8%
- Female: 82%
- White: 41%
- Age: 18 - 22 (87%)
- Strong association between university attended and race



Results (cont.)

Use of ICT at university

- All students had access to computers and the Internet at university
- Frequency: almost 40% use ICT daily, 35% use weekly
- There was a strong association between race and university attended, and use of ICT
- High levels of confidence for printing, email and online search
- Low levels of confidence for CPD, research, forum discussion

Results (cont.)

Experiences and perceptions of ICT for support:

- Students who had access to ICT at home and at high school were more likely to have used ICT at university
- Most respondents agreed that ICT has a positive role to play in supporting students (> 70%)
- Students more likely to seek support from those most suited to provide it
- Methods: face-to-face (95%), email (25%)
- Most students were satisfied with current levels of support (> 80%).

Discussion

- View ICT as a means of accessing information, rather than obtaining support
- ICT consistently shown to enhance communication, yet students fail to use it for this purpose
- Students current support systems are not likely to be present post-graduation
- Reduced levels of confidence using ICT for research

Conclusion

- ICT has been shown to be a feasible means of supporting physiotherapy students
- Students have the skills to use ICT to seek support and to enhance their studies, but do not apply them
- Inequality in access still present
- Physiotherapy departments should consider developing and implementing of a comprehensive ICT strategy

Thank you