

Original Article

Communication Anxiety Among Multidisciplinary Health Professionals During Online Sessions in COVID-19

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to determine the communication anxiety among multidisciplinary health professionals during online sessions in COVID-19 and to recognize the causes of communication anxiety.

Methods: Cross sectional study was done sample size was 50 with no specific proportion among professionals. Sample was taken from three professionals from a multidisciplinary team which were speech SLP/SLT, psychologist and physiotherapist. Data was collected by using a 25 questions questionnaire. Data was collected online from speech language pathologist/therapist, psychologist, and physiotherapist. Permissions were taken for data collection. Demographics were taken.

Results: Tables from SPSS show analyzed results. Data collected was analyzed by using the SPSS. Endnote was used for the references.

Conclusion: There is a great call to make strategies, to build tailored solutions to resolve these issues that are discussed in discussion which lead to communication anxiety and provide the multidisciplinary health professionals with meaningful resources for online sessions. One most important point is that we should normalize tele practice in Pakistan both for patients and professionals. It will be beneficial for the coming generation of students if we trained them tele practice and add it in their courses as well.

Key words: communication anxiety, multidisciplinary health professionals, coronavirus (COVID-19)

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Introduction

Studies have investigated communication anxiety among students undergoing English programs in a university in Malaysia.¹ Literature shows that because of this COVID-19 situation in many countries psychological health of a lot of health care professionals is under discourse. A patient in Wuhan City, China, was diagnosed with a rare pneumonia in early December 2019. By 31 December, a lot of patients suffering from pneumonia with not known origin had been notified by the Beijing Regional Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) from the same town.² Researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology conducted metagenomics research over the next few days using adjoining-origin order from a Broncho alveolar irrigation illustra-

tive and identified a novel coronavirus as the possible etiology to be used. They named it novel coronavirus 2019 (nCoV-2019).³ This is referred to as 2019 coronaviruses by US centers of disease control and prevention (CDC) (2019-nCoV).⁴

This virus known as COVID-19 started swiftly advance in from Wuhan of China to the other parts of world and other countries.⁵ Cases in other countries were outlined in people who came from Wuhan. This resulted in spread of COVID-19 to other countries all around the world.⁶ There were 1179 cases of COVID-19 in Pakistan as of 26 March 2020.⁷ This is interesting to note that the amount of latest cases in China had recently decreased, they have steadily risen in countries other than China such as Korea, USA, United Kingdom, France,

Germany, Pakistan, India, Iran and others.⁸ Pakistan has announced the closure for major cities of all schools, colleges and universities with a partial lockdown throughout the country. It was concluded that the quarantine conditions were unsatisfactory, but were beneficial to a significant survivor.⁹ In response to the 2019 coronavirus flare-up, the Government of Pakistan announced the complete lock down including schools, universities, all public places. This was the step taken for the prevention from spread of the virus. Citizens were ordered to not do any work and they were said to not leave their houses. Thanks to the government of Pakistan who have the backup plan for the situation by which student's education was again starting by using internet. Every educational program was online available school's universities have also started to give students online classes after government announcements.¹⁰ To develop and deliver online education system to students on time thorough television and internet.¹¹ A lot of schools and undercities have started the online semesters and a lot more courses are offered to students online in a systematically.¹² By making sure that studies of students are not disturbed by this emergency situation will make parents satisfied with education of their children. It will lessen their stress.¹³ Just like this there are health care professionals have started online sessions of their patients. A Multidisciplinary Team is a Service professional team a multidisciplinary team is a group of practitioners from one or more healthcare backgrounds who agree together on the best care for particular patients. The doctors, the nurses, the occupational-therapists, the physio-therapists, the dieticians, the speech and language therapists, and the neuro-psychologists all make a multidisciplinary team.¹⁴ Communication is process of sharing thoughts, needs and information of any kind.¹⁵ Anxiety is an emotion that is characterized by anxiety, worried thoughts and physical changes such as elevated blood pressure. Usually people with anxiety disorders have frequent or recurrent feelings or fears. They should prevent circumstances as troubling as these. We can also experience physical symptoms including sweating, trembling, dizziness or a rapid heartbeat.¹⁶ "Anxiety or fear associated with real or anticipated contact with others" is anxiety of communication.¹⁷ Communication anxiety or communication apprehension is an individual's anxiety associated with anticipated communication. It can be minor and it can be at high level. many people face communication anxiety and as a result they try to be quite most of the time. They prefer not to communicate with others and imagine if they are forced to communicate what will be their condition. one more definition defined of communication apprehension is that it is a sort of shyness comes from communicating with others.

There are different types of communication anxiety or communication apprehension. For instance, a teacher may not feel communication apprehension while communicating with his or her tutees but the same teacher may feel apprehension while communicating with head of the school or any senior in this person face situational constraints. There is one more situation like a person may not feel apprehension when talking to a group of people but if when of them ask him to have a talk in private when after others are not there then he may become apprehensive to communicate. This can be a situational communication anxiety or communication apprehension. Some level of communication anxiety or communication apprehension is naturally present in nearly everybody problem starts when it became so severe that it made person non responsive.¹⁸ In this present modern era especially the internet and the world of digital devices have a impression on many or we can say every attribute of everybody's life and in this pandemic situation it is only one thing by which everybody is connected with one and other.¹⁹ The realm of medicine is an area in which internet is very helpful now a day. Previous research clearly outlined the latent for use of telemedicine in tragedies and emergencies for health of citizens.²⁰ From decades, the use of telemedicine or revolution to assist and facilitate issues like distance from clinics etc. have been helpful. Popular ways involve broadcast conferencing, storage and evolving tech-neology, devices used for wellbeing, and messages. In the same era diseases that are detrimental for wellbeing of all creatures are escalating.²¹ Literature shows that how much anxiety level has been increased in people in this pandemic situation. Because of lockdown. Because of this condition patients of stroke with aphasia who were taking therapies on daily bases because of their serious conditions are badly affected. Seeing these conditions multidisciplinary teams have started online sessions of these patients.²² But because of this pandemic situation patient and all health professionals are already under great stress.²³ Although by starting these online sessions patient is getting benefits but may be some of multidisciplinary professionals are facing some problems also one of which is communication anxiety. Which is not good for their mental health and ultimately not good for patients also.²⁴ They feel stress by thinking whether their patients are understanding them are getting their point. Or by thinking that are their patients understanding them. some thoughts like this also increase communication anxiety.²⁵

Methods

Study design used in this research was cross-sectional study. The questionnaire was online filled by SLP/Ts,

physiotherapist and psychologist. Study duration of this research was 4 months after when synopsis was approved. Sample size was 50 with no specific proportion among professionals. Sample was taken from Three professionals from a multidisciplinary team which were speech SLP/Ts, psychologist and physiotherapist. Technique used in this study was convenient technique of sampling. Data was collected by using a 25 questions questionnaire. Data was collected online from speech language pathologist/therapist, psychologist, and physiotherapist who were taking online sessions in this pandemic situation COVID-19. Data collected was analyzed by using the SPSS version 25. Endnote was used for the references.

Results

Data consisting social and demographic factors was collected gender, profession and age. In which the majority of the participants were of age group 20-30 and females outnumbered male by 76%. 46% of the participants were speech language pathologists, 42% were psychologists and 12% were physiotherapists. In addition, more details relating to COVID-19 explicitly

Table 1: Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
AGE		
20-30	31	62.0
31-40	11	22.0
41-50	6	12.0
51-60	2	4.0
GENDER		
Male	12	24
Female	38	76
PROFESSION		
SLP/T	23	46.0
physiotherapist	6	12.0
psychologist	21	42.0

asked participants whether they were taking online sessions of their patients due to COVID-19 situation. Majority of the participants agreed about taking online session. Further questions were asked regarding communication anxiety which are discussed in discussion.

Table 2: Prime Questions from Questionnaire and their Responses

Sr.no	Items	Responses
1	I think online sessions are as helpful as in clinic.	Majority disagree 26(52%), minority strongly disagree 4(8%).
2	Online sessions have increased behavioral issues.	Majority agree 31(62%) agreed, minority3(6%) strongly agree.
3	I feel it is difficult to engage patient during online session.	Majority agree 18(32%), minority5(10%) strongly agree.
4	I think it is difficult to communicate during online sessions as compared to session in clinic.	Majority agree 25(50%), minority strongly disagree 2(4%).
	I feel stressed when thinking if patient is hearing properly or understanding me during online session or not.	Majority agree 24(48%), minority 6(12%) strongly agree.
5	I feel irritated when I don't understand what the patient is saying because of internet connection.	Majority 28(56%) agree, minority 6(12%) strongly agree.
6	I am experiencing communication difficulties with patients during online sessions	Majority agree 21(42%) and minority strongly agree 1(2%).
7	I feel stress when my patient does not engage in activity during online session.	Majority agree with 28(56%) and minority 3(6%)strongly agree.
8	Little issues like communication problem due to internet or any issue from patient's side during online session stresses me.	Majority21(42%)agree, minority1(2%)strongly disagree.
9	Sometimes I have trouble managing other responsibilities together with online sessions.	Majority19(38%)agree, minority1(2%)strongly disagree.
10	To some extent my current life is near my ideal life.	Majority disagree 20(40%) ,minority7(14%) agree
11	Online sessions have given me more resources to explore to keep my patients engaged.	Majority agree and remain neutral with 19(38%) and minority1(2%)strongly agree.
12	I think it is difficult for the patients to build their interest in online session	Majority agree and disagree 14(28%)and minority strongly agree7(14%).

Discussion

Data consisting social and demographic factors was collected gender, profession and age. In which the majority of the participants were of age group 20-30 and females outnumbered male by 76%. 46% of the participants were speech language pathologists, 42% were psychologists and 12% were physiotherapists. In addition, more details relating to COVID-19 explicitly asked participants whether they were taking online sessions of their patients due to COVID-19 situation. Majority of the participants agreed about taking online session. A study published by JAMA discussed in literature review it has said that Acknowledging the causes of apprehension helps health care practitioners and agencies build tailored solutions to resolve these issues and give their health care workers with meaningful resources.²⁶ This study by its results tells us about factors or causes that add to the professional's stress and it may lead to communication anxiety.

As one statement which was asked from participants was if online sessions are as helpful as session in clinics most of the participants have disagreed with the statement. Furthermore, most of the participants agree that online session have increased behavioral issues in patients plus they do not pay as much attention to session as they pay during session in clinic and they feel difficulty in engaging patients in online session both of these factors are the reason of stress for them because in the questionnaires question was asked that if it stresses them when their patient do not engage in activity during online sessions and 56% of them agreed with the statement. 42% of the participants agreed that any little issue regarding their session stresses them like bad internet connection most of the participants have agreed that it stresses them when they do not understand what the patient is saying and they feel stressed by thinking if their patient is hearing them properly.²⁷

So as the study mentioned earlier published in JAMA proves that first it is important to see what are the factors or issues that stress health care professionals or that increases their anxiety these were the findings about factors that add to the stress of multidisciplinary health care professionals. These causes of stress or distress may not need to affect everyone, anxiety can undermine the trust of this staff and workers upon them and on every other thing. Which is sign of problem in their emotional wellbeing. Perceiving the causes of anxiety helps practitioners of wellbeing and agencies in building tailored solutions resolve all issues and bestow their health care workers with meaningful resources.²⁶ Now comes statements on which equal numbers of participants agree and are neutral. statement was if they think it is difficult for the patient to build their interest in sessions, 28% agreed and 28% remain neutral. Another statement was that if online sessions have given them more

resources to explore to keep their patient engaged, 38% of the participants agreed and 38% remain neutral. There is a book foreword by Dr S. Venkatesan according to which tele practice needs more consideration in Pakistan in Pakistan tele practice is not common and students are not trained properly about tele practice and they lack in field of strategies for tele practice it can be one reason that's why in this emergency situation of COVID-19 they have face communication anxiety Although it was completely new for both patients and some professionals also.²⁸ That's why it was difficult for the patient to engage himself in session because it's difficult for the patient with special needs to be treated by online sessions and their condition with bad internet connection plus other issues like inattentiveness of caregiver can make them tiresome and issues like these can make problems for the professionals to take online sessions. There is a lot more difference in circumstances during session in clinic versus sessions online as in this study discussed above shows us that most of the participants have agreed that patients don't not pay as much attention during online sessions as they pay during session in clinic.

One statement was asked from participants that if sometimes they feel that they do not want to face an online session most of them disagreed with the statement and one more statement was if they have trouble managing other responsibilities with online sessions then most of them have agreed as you can see in results. This shows that they want to take online sessions but they need strategies to overcome their stressful situations to conquer their communication anxiety.²⁹ Please note that one question about communication difficulty during online session was asked in starting of the questionnaire from participants and 42% agreed that they are facing communication difficulties and 30% disagreed and 26% remain neutral then after asking questions regarding all the issues that stresses them during online session one question was again asked about that if they feel it difficult to communicate during online session and 50% participants have agreed, 14% disagreed and 22% remain neutral. So these are the findings suggested by the data of this study. by which we can say that multidisciplinary health professionals have experienced communication anxiety during online sessions in this COVID-19 and this study has told us the factors that have increased the stress of professionals.

Conclusion

Result and discussion shows us that professionals have faced stress and communication difficulties during online sessions. We can say that professionals are willing to discuss their issues and challenges which they are facing while taking online session in this pandemic

situation but they may want it to do so in interviews in a considerate environment. There is a great call to make strategies, to build tailored solutions to resolve these issues that are discussed in discussion which lead to communication anxiety and provide the multidisciplinary health professionals with meaningful resources for online sessions. One most important point is that we should normalize tele practice in Pakistan both for patients and professionals. It will be beneficial for the coming generation of students if we trained them tele practice and add it in their courses as well. This is influential in order to guard the standard and quality of online sessions.

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