

My Research Diary – Niamh Brady

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Pre-focus group interview reflection

I am carrying out a focus group study to explore the perspectives of physiotherapists regarding the role of virtual reality (VR) interventions in the management of musculoskeletal pain. At this point, I have begun to recruit participants and will soon conduct an online focus group interview via Microsoft teams with the help of my research colleague Beate Dejaco.

As a physiotherapist myself I have of course got my own ideas around the potential for VR to play a part in managing all sorts of musculoskeletal conditions, including shoulder pain. I have previously used non-immersive VR in clinical practice for rehabilitation of other conditions (stroke, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis). In my experience, VR was useful for helping to motivate people to exercise. I have since researched the application of VR to other healthcare settings including pain management and anxiety management. Personally, I felt that VR could be a useful tool for musculoskeletal pain management and decided to structure my PhD work around exploring this concept.

In this study, I want to encourage clinical physiotherapists to share their ideas based on experience of using VR themselves. I am aware that while I am open to all kinds of opinions and suggestions, I see VR in a positive light and can imagine a role for VR in clinical practice. I am conscious that I must take care not to present my biases to the group as this would have the potential to influence participant' opinions. I must also be aware that in analyzing the data, I must question my own reactions to the data. I have chosen a qualitative descriptive approach to data analysis to ensure that I present a straight description of the data. This reduces the risk of me misinterpreting the data collected.

On a positive note, I believe that being a physiotherapist will make participants (who are also physiotherapists) more at ease in sharing experiences. I think that my being a physiotherapist will foster a sense of trust and a belief that I will be able to truly hear what they are saying as I am coming from a similar clinical background. This is a potential to advantage to my position as primary researcher.