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Summary:

Background: There is a paucity of research on tele rehabilitation in the delivery of occupational therapy for persons with upper extremity conditions. Describing and defining what constitutes this delivery method of occupational therapy can facilitate the acceptance and use of tele rehabilitation in a way that aligns with the philosophy of the profession. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, tele rehabilitation has become essential for the delivery of healthcare services, including occupational therapy.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of occupational therapists who have provided tele rehabilitation interventions for persons with upper extremity conditions.

Methodology: The principal investigator conducted online interviews with each of the five occupational therapists using a password-protected video platform. The principal investigator asked open-ended questions about the participant's telerehabilitation experiences treating upper extremity conditions. Researchers independently analyzed transcriptions and audio files of the interviews to develop codes and categories, which were used to identify emerging themes.

Key findings: The following themes emerged from the data: therapeutic empowerment, safety concerns, types of intervention processes, multidisciplinary approach of local and remote therapists, building rapport, and the logistics of referrals, documentation and reimbursement, and the barriers and benefits of tele rehabilitation.

Implications: The results of this study provide much needed support for the continuance of tele rehabilitation as a method of delivery for occupational therapy services, particularly for persons with upper extremity conditions. Findings also promote future research into the efficacy of using either tele rehabilitation as a delivery method for occupational therapy services in a single or hybrid approach.