

Meet Virtual Reality, Your New Physical Therapist

June 01, 2021

...

To really push the use of virtual reality for physical and occupational therapy, “we’ll need to build a body of evidence that shows it’s effective, how we pay for it and how we can develop it in a way that’s easy to use,” said Matthew Stoudt, chief executive and a founder of AppliedVR, which supplies therapeutic virtual reality. “We have to be able to demonstrate that we can bring down the cost of care, not just add to the cost paradigm.”

While research specifically on V.R. use in physical and occupational therapy is in the early stages, an analysis of 27 studies, conducted by Matt C. Howard, an assistant professor of marketing and quantitative methods at the University of South Alabama, found that V.R. therapy is, in general, more effective than traditional programs.

“Does it mean V.R. is better for everything? Of course not,” he said in an interview. “And there’s a lot we still don’t know about V.R. rehab.”

Much of the research uses small samples with varying degrees of rigor, and more needs to be studied about how a patient’s activity in the virtual world translates into improved performance in the physical world, said Danielle Levac, an assistant professor in the department of physical therapy, movement and rehabilitation sciences at Northeastern University. Professor Levac researches the rationale for using virtual reality systems in pediatric rehabilitation; many of the children she works with have cerebral palsy.

...