

Role-play: Identify barriers and facilitators to health literacy and adoption of digital health tools and technologies among clients (4 hours)



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Role-play 1

“Helping Grandpa with His Recovery – Bridging the Digital Gap”

Intended learning outcomes

At the end of this role play, students should be able to,

- understand the socio-cultural and technological barriers older adults face.
- practice empathy and communication strategies with hesitant patients.
- learn to use a patient-centered approach to introduce digital tools.
- recognize the importance of family and caregiver involvement.

Mr. Fernando is attending outpatient physiotherapy sessions after a stroke. The clinic is piloting a new mobile health (mHealth) app to help patients track their home exercises and communicate with therapists. A junior Physiotherapist is assigned to introduce this tool to Mr. Fernando, but challenges arise.

Setting:

A Government Hospital in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Characters:

1. **Junior Physiotherapist (Student 1)** – Recently started clinical placement.
2. **Senior Physiotherapist (Student 2)** – Supervising the Junior.
3. **Mr. Fernando (Student 3)** – 70-year-old retired teacher recovering from a stroke.
4. **Mr. Fernando's Granddaughter (Student 4)** – University student, supportive.

How to play a person with limited HL

The person who acts as the patient with limited HL, should show a weak gesture by looking at the physiotherapists and his granddaughter to understand what the things they try to explain. With the facial expression show how unfamiliar and uncomfortable he is with technical applications in the phone.

Junior Physiotherapist

The person who acts as a junior Physiotherapist should have enthusiasm in his gestures and his readiness to introduce this new app.

Grand daughter

The person who acts as the granddaughter should show an enthusiastic gesture to learn this new app and listen carefully to the instructions given. Also, she should show caring manner to the grandfather with willingness to help him with the technology

Senior Physiotherapist: Caring and mature gesture

Role-Play Dialogue

Junior Physiotherapist: Good morning, Mr. Fernando! I heard you've been doing well with your exercises. We're using a new mobile app to help patients like you continue therapy at home. Would you be interested?

Mr. Fernando: (confused) An app? I only use my phone to answer calls. These new things are too complicated for me. Why can't you just write it on paper?

Granddaughter: Grandpa it's actually quite simple. I can help you use it. It shows videos of exercises and you can message the physio too.

Mr. Fernando: Hmm... maybe, if someone shows me slowly. But sometimes the phone buttons are too small, and I forget what to press.

Senior Physio: We've seen many older patients like you benefit with a bit of help from family. Maybe your granddaughter can help set it up, and we'll give you a printed guide too.

Identified Barriers (for Debrief):

- Low digital literacy: Mr. Fernando is unfamiliar with smartphone apps.
- Cognitive and physical limitations: Post-stroke effects may impair usability.
- Fear of technology: Apprehension about doing something wrong.
- Lack of infrastructure: Possible weak internet connectivity or lack of a suitable device.
- Cultural preferences: Trust in face-to-face interaction and paper-based instructions.

Identified Facilitators:

- Family support: Granddaughter's involvement is a strong enabler.
- Bilingual instructions: Offering Sinhala/Tamil guides helps comprehension.
- Blended approach: Combining app with traditional methods (e.g., printed sheets).
- Peer influence: Seeing other patients benefit could increase confidence.
- Training and reinforcement: Regular follow-up and guidance by physiotherapists.

Role-play 2

"Can I Really Use This App?" – Supporting an Older Adult in the Clinic

Intended learning Outcomes

By the end of the role play, students will be able to:

- identify individual-level barriers to digital health tool adoption among older adults.
- recognize facilitators that support digital engagement without caregiver assistance.
- practice patient-centered communication and teaching strategies.

- develop empathy and adaptability when working with older adults in a Sri Lankan setting.

Setting

Physiotherapy Outpatient Department, Base Hospital, Nawalapitiya

Characters

- **Mrs. Herath** (played by Student A): 70-year-old retired seamstress with osteoarthritis, attending physiotherapy twice a week.
- **Junior Physiotherapist** (played by Student B): Undergraduate intern explaining the use of a mobile app to support her home exercise program.
- **Senior Physiotherapist** (played by Student C): Supervisor observing and guiding the intern.

How to play a person with limited HL

The person acts as the patient with limited HL, should show a weak gesture by looking at the physiotherapists. With the facial expression show how unfamiliar and uncomfortable he is with technical applications in the phone.

Junior Physiotherapist

The person who acts as a junior Physiotherapist should have enthusiasm in his gestures and his readiness to introduce this new app.

Senior Physiotherapist

Caring and with a mature gesture

Scenario background

The clinic has introduced a **Sinhala-language mobile app** with demonstration videos and reminders for patients with chronic musculoskeletal conditions. The intern is asked to introduce the tool to Mrs. Herath, who owns a basic Android smartphone but has never used apps. She lives alone and has no immediate family helping her with technology.

Suggested dialogues**Junior Physiotherapist:**

“Good morning, Mrs. Herath. You're doing well with your exercises. I'd like to show you a mobile app you can use at home to keep improving. It has simple videos in Sinhala.”

Mrs. Herath:

“Ah, I don't know about these apps, son. I only know how to make calls. I've never used those things.”

Junior Physiotherapist:

“That's completely fine. Many people feel the same at first. May I show you how it works on my phone first? You don't have to do anything right now.”

Mrs. Herath:

“Okay, but I might forget everything. I don't have anyone at home to help.”

Junior Physiotherapist:

“We’ve made it simple, just three buttons to use. I can write it down for you too. And we can practice together before you go today. Also, the app works offline once we install it.”

Senior Physiotherapist:

“It’s part of our program to help you manage your health independently. You can keep using your paper schedule too, and we’ll check your progress when you come in.”

Mrs. Herath:

“Well... if you show me a few times, I can try. But don’t take away my printed sheet!”

Key barriers identified in the scenario

- **Low digital literacy** (unfamiliar with apps or touchscreens)
- Fear of forgetting steps
- No support person available
- Lack of confidence in using technology
- Preference for traditional formats (printed material)
- Assumed complexity of digital tools

Facilitators demonstrated

- Patient-centered communication in Sinhala
- Demonstration using the therapist’s device
- Simplified instructions and repetition
- Visual aids and offline access
- Use of dual formats (digital + paper)
- Encouragement and confidence building

Discussion questions

1. How did the intern make the digital tool more approachable?
2. What specific strategies helped build trust and reduce anxiety?
3. Why is it important to keep paper-based options?
4. How can physiotherapists in Sri Lanka promote digital inclusion without family support?
5. What system or clinic-level changes could help older adults like Mrs. Herath?

Role-play 3

“A New Way to Heal”

Intended learning outcomes

Physiotherapy undergraduates will:

- identify common barriers and facilitators affecting older adults’ use of digital health tools.
- develop effective communication strategies to support digital health literacy.
- build awareness of the needs of older adults in rural or semi-urban Sri Lankan settings.
- practice culturally sensitive and age-appropriate patient education.

Setting:

Outpatient Physiotherapy Unit – Teaching Hospital, Peradeniya.

Characters

- Mr. Perera (played by Student A): A 69-year-old retired government clerk attending physiotherapy for post-stroke rehabilitation. He owns a basic smartphone but rarely uses it beyond calling.
- Junior Physiotherapist (played by Student B): A final-year physiotherapy student tasked with introducing a Sinhala-language exercise app.
- Senior Physiotherapist (played by Student C): Observes and provides feedback on the intern's communication approach.

Background of the scenario

The hospital has introduced a mobile app that provides guided home exercises in Sinhala and Tamil, tailored for older patients. The Junior Physiotherapist is expected to introduce and encourage the use of this app with patients who are continuing rehabilitation at home. Mr. Perera is hesitant about technology and has not used any apps before.

Suggested dialogues**Junior Physiotherapist:**

"Ayubowan, Mr. Perera. You're progressing well. We now have a new app in Sinhala that shows your exercises as videos. It can remind you to do your home program."

Mr. Perera:

"App? Hmm... I've never used those. I only answer calls. My phone is not for all that modern work."

Junior Physiotherapist:

"That's okay, sir. Many patients your age feel the same. But this app is very simple. I can show you now. Would you like to watch how it works on my phone first?"

Mr. Perera:

"Well, I don't want to press something wrong and spoil the phone. And I can't read English."

Junior Physiotherapist:

"No worries at all! The app is fully in Sinhala. And you don't have to type anything—just tap one button to start the video. We can practice here until you're confident."

Mr. Perera:

"But sometimes I forget what to do. I'm not good with these things."

Junior Physiotherapist:

"That's normal, sir. I can write down the steps in Sinhala and include some pictures. You'll also keep getting reminders on your phone. It will beep to remind you when it's time to exercise."

Mr. Perera:

"Okay... if it's in Sinhala and you help me learn it, I'll try."

Barriers identified

- Limited digital literacy
- Fear of making mistakes or damaging the phone
- Language barriers (preference for Sinhala over English)

- Memory and cognitive concerns (forgetting steps)
- Lack of confidence
- Unfamiliarity with health apps or technology

Facilitators demonstrated

- App in native language (Sinhala)
- Visual, step-by-step demonstration
- Written instructions with images/icons
- Encouragement and reassurance
- Opportunity to practice with support
- Use of simple interface and reminder functions
- Availability of offline access (if mentioned)

Post role-play questions for students

1. What communication techniques helped reduce the patient's anxiety?
2. What were the specific concerns Mr. Perera expressed?
3. How did the Junior Physiotherapist address each concern?
4. What could be done at the system level (e.g., in hospitals or app design) to make digital tools more accessible?
5. How would this conversation differ in a rural vs. urban context?