

TELEHEALTH AND PHYSICAL THERAPY: PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Purpose

This study explored early delivery of telehealth (TH) among physical therapists (PTs) amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Participants

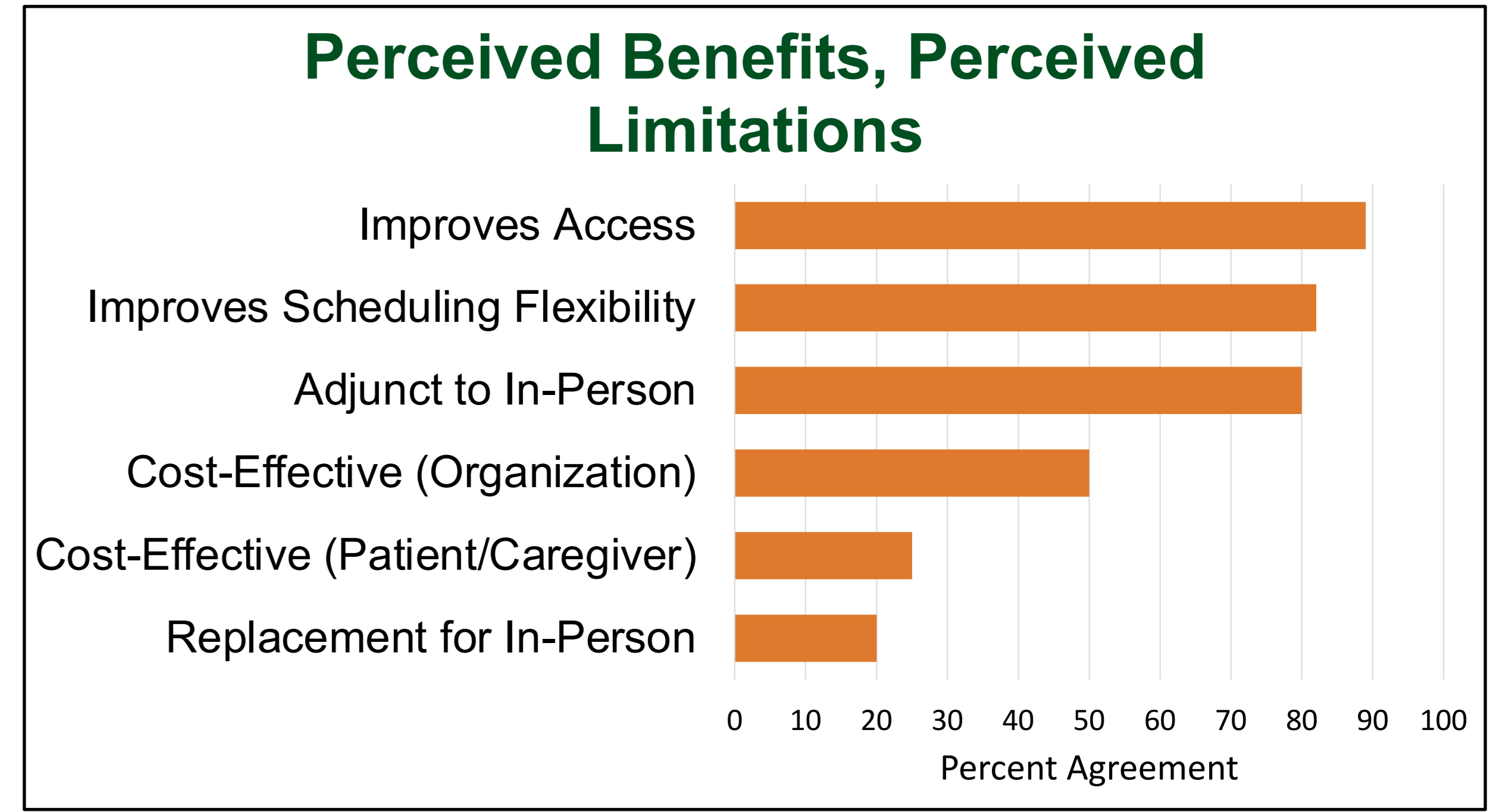
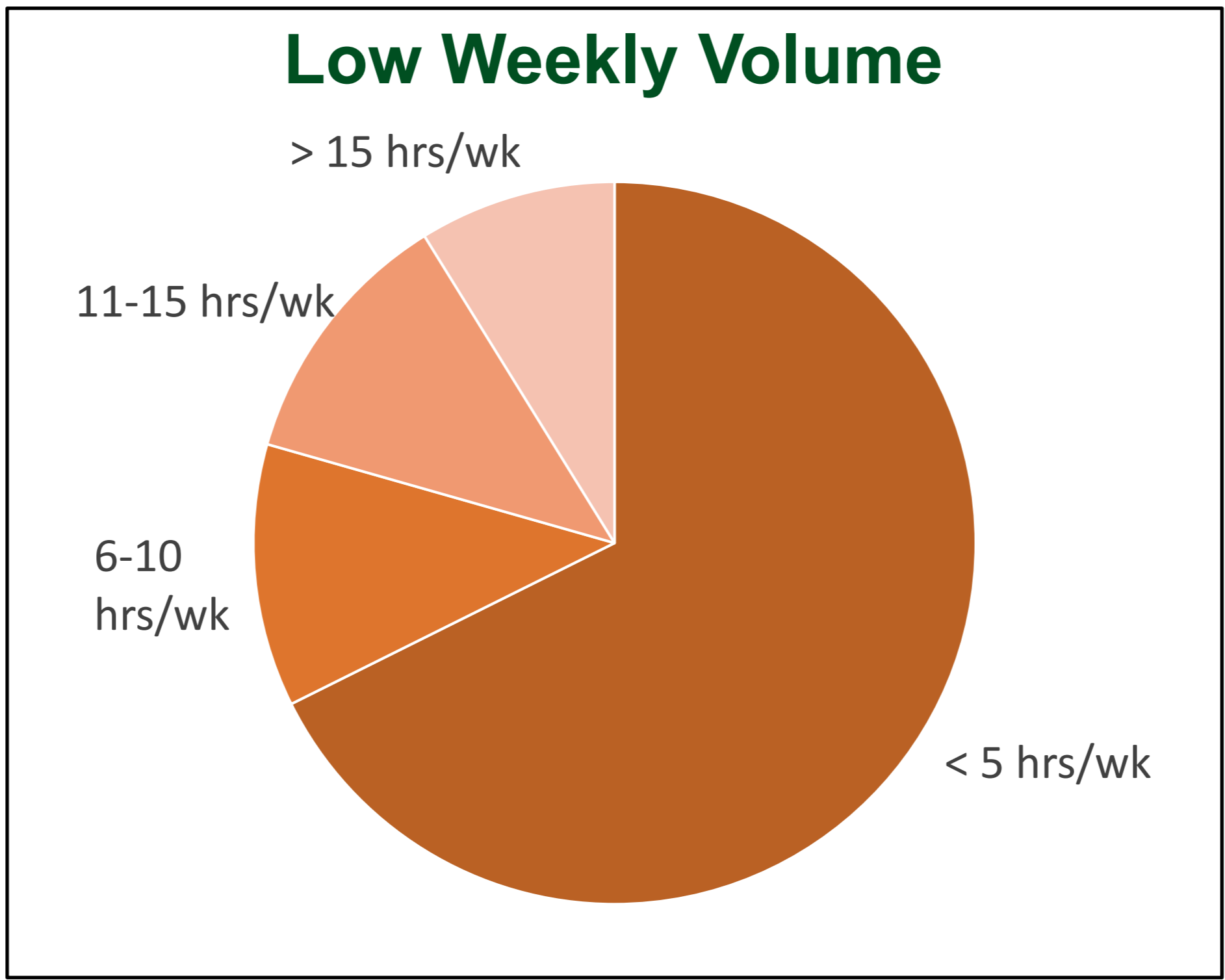
Sixty-eight PTs from 14 counties completed the survey – 44 PTs were identified as treating orthopedic conditions.

Methods

- Descriptive, cross-sectional online survey study
- Developed from existing instruments – Service User Technology Acceptability Questionnaire and Telehealth Usability Questionnaire
- Fifty-eight items distributed across three sections:
 - Demographics
 - Telehealth training and utilization patterns
 - Perceptions of telehealth service delivery
- Participants recruited using snowball sampling via:
 - Florida Physical Therapy Association (FPTA)
 - University of Miami Health System (UHealth)
- Data collected May-June 2020 (6 weeks) and analyzed by section (above)

Results

- Over 40% of PTs received no formal training for TH and of those who did, training varied substantially – from 1 to 15 hours.
- Despite training variability, the majority of PTs felt they had sufficient resources (77%), experience (73%), and knowledge (66%).
- Many PTs (61%) used TH from their offices, while the remainder did so from home (36%) or from both home and office (3%).

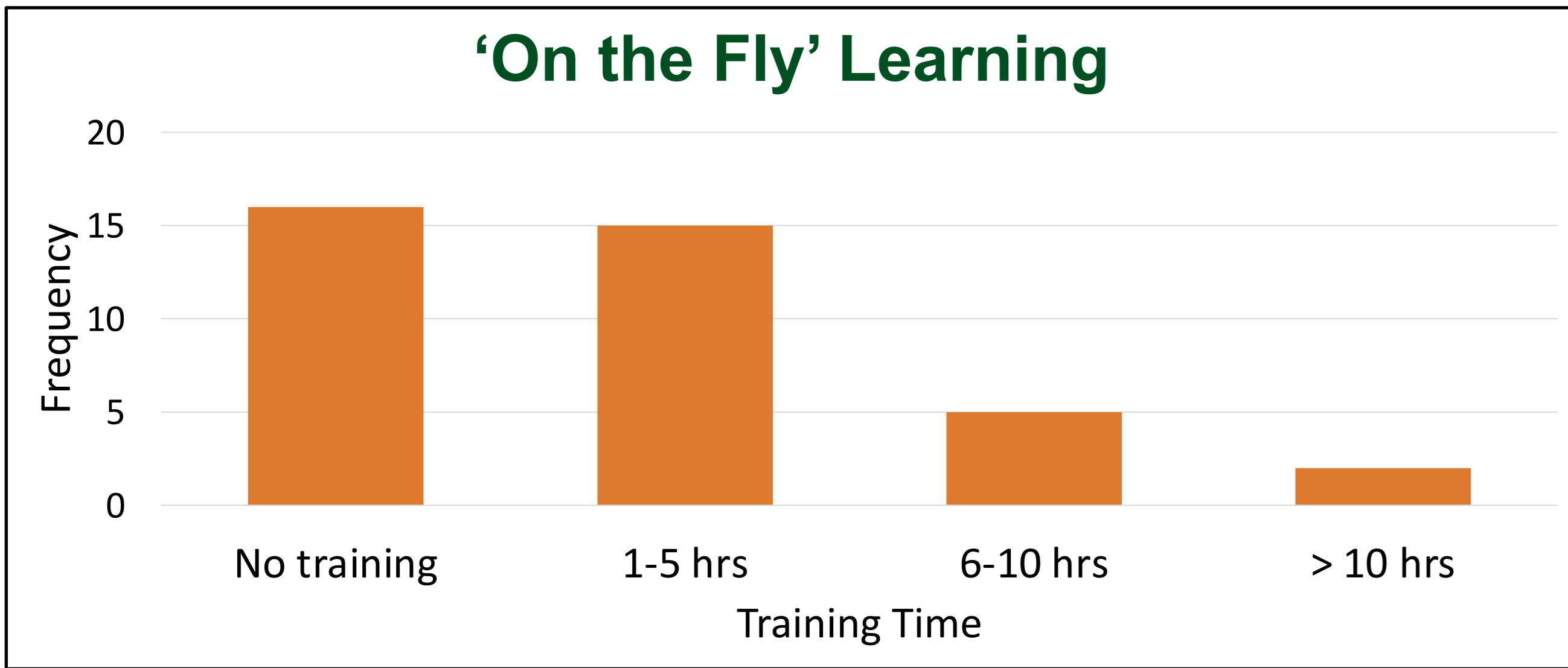


Conclusions

- No standard exists for TH training, utilization, or delivery.
- Although there is an apparent contrast between traditional models of care and TH and overall weekly TH volume was low, many PTs embraced the new service.
- Many PTs agree about the strengths and limitations of TH, particularly when considering traditional models.

Clinical Relevance

- Physical therapists perceive a role for TH in patient care, perhaps as an adjunct.
- Even as an adjunct, the circumstances in which TH is most appropriate and well-received are poorly defined.
- Future studies should explore new models of physical therapy care that include TH with special consideration for service perceptions, access, quality, and cost.



- Telehealth was not a substitute for a standard caseload – nearly 70% of PTs used the service < 5 hrs/wk and few viewed it as a replacement for in-person visits (20%).
- Consensus was that TH improves both access to care (89%) and scheduling flexibility (82%).
- The majority of PTs viewed TH as effective (68%), despite notable limitations:
 - Telehealth is cost-effective for the organization – 50% agreement
 - Telehealth is cost-effective for the patient/caregiver – 25% agreement

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