

Physiotalk: connectedness and constructive change

- a qualitative study

Physiotalk



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Introduction

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is mandatory for UK physiotherapists and valued internationally. Barriers exist to accessing and engaging in CPD including funding and time related pressures. In an increasingly digital age social media, specifically Twitter, may provide a source of up-to-date knowledge and professional development that can support CPD in line with registrant standards. However, there is a lack of research into whether a professionally based tweetchat provides relevant CPD that has an impact on individual practice as well as service provision.

Purpose

This study aims to explore impacts of taking part in physiotalk tweetchats on CPD and professional practice, from participants' perspectives.

Methods

Two stages of data collection were conducted using a qualitative Phenomenological approach. Potential participants were users of the physiotalk tweetchats or website and invited to participate through promotional tweets and blog postings. Stage 1 involved an online semi-structured focus group through a #physiotalk tweetchat. Questions addressed meaning and use of physiotalk, influences on participation, and impacts on CPD and practice. Stage 2 enabled people to respond more fully through email or direct messages. Thematic analysis of tweets was undertaken.

My 1st experience was a LBP chat & this certainly widened my view of SM to use for CPD.

I also used to be like this but I've found #physiotalk community to be very welcoming and supportive of ideas/contributions

It gives structure to an essentially structure less platform

Chance to meet a more global community & physios from other localities, invite external views, so many positives!

I used #physiotalk as a student to highlight 'real-life' current issues physios were facing - this really helped in interviews

Results

586 tweets were sent during 75 minutes of discussion between 70 tweeting participants. The tweet analysis resulted in themes that described physiotalk as enabling social media skills development and engagement, and facilitating ring-fenced time and structured interactions. Participants felt that chats focused on topics relevant to practice, and generated a supportive, non-hierarchical international community that included physiotherapists, other professionals and service users.

Participants reported that this virtual environment enabled constructive change at an individual level, such as increased confidence, broadening views and engagement with research and evidence. At a local level, participants found that tweetchats informed practice through knowledge transfer, networking and discussion. National and international impacts were also evident, through development of collaborations and use of physiotalk as a platform for representation and influencing others. These themes were found to be interlinked as illustrated in the explanatory theory of tweetchat generation of professional connectedness and constructive change (Figure one). The tweets shown illustrate the evidence for these themes and interlinkages.

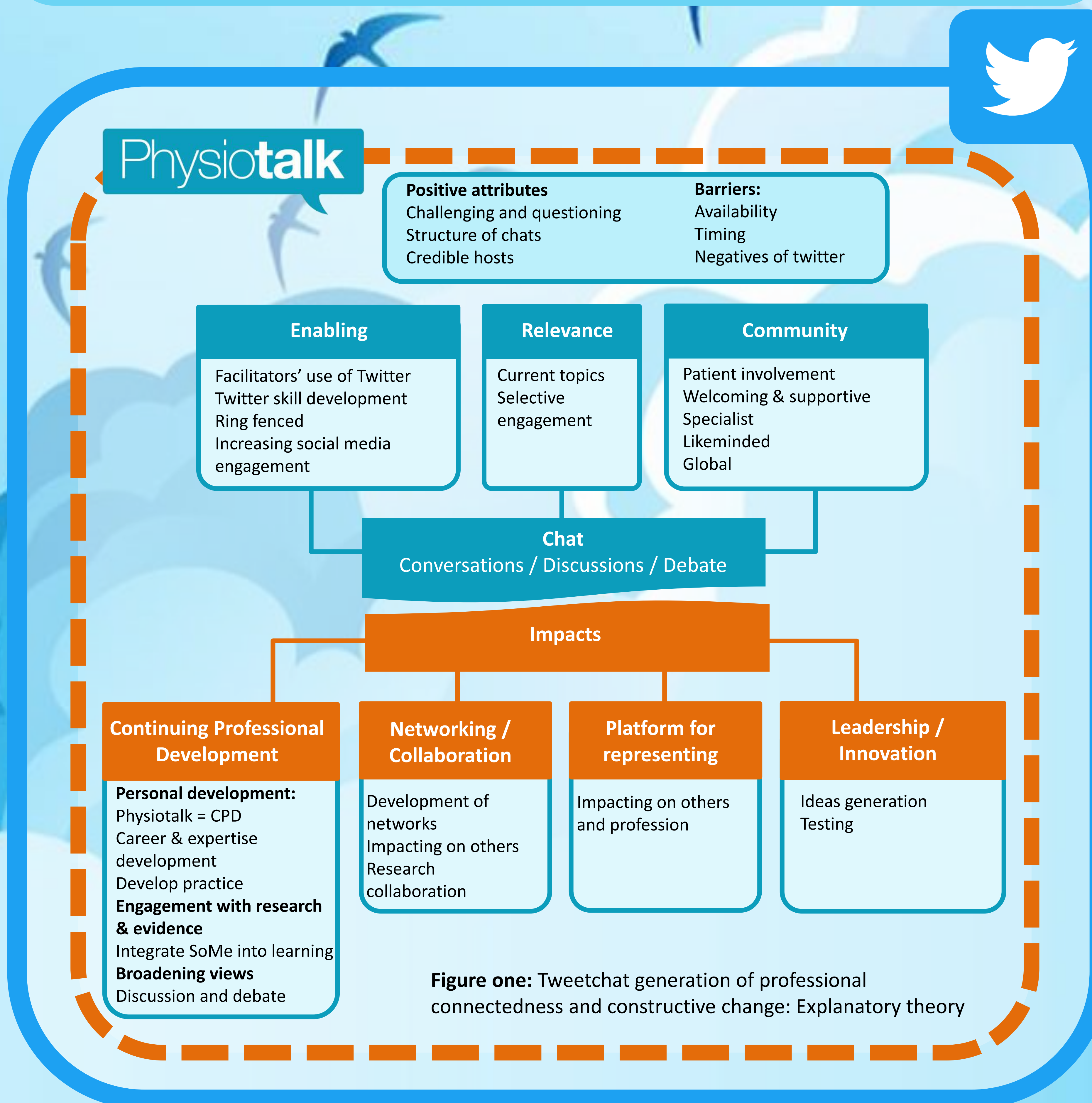


Figure one: Tweetchat generation of professional connectedness and constructive change: Explanatory theory

Key learning

The results of this Twitter focus group demonstrate that where people feel facilitated and welcomed in an online discussion forum, there is great potential for constructive change at individual, local, national and international levels. This may lead to developments that impact positively on patients and professionals. This is, but also goes beyond, CPD for participants. It is important to note that there is only a small pool of people who regularly engage in physiotalk tweetchats. Further exploration of barriers to engagement is important as well as possible ways of increasing participation to achieve these benefits more widely.

Implications

Tweetchats can be promoted as a valid and freely available form of CPD, enabling international viewpoints to be shared. Networks and collaborations formed through these chats can lead to wider constructive change in practice and the profession.

The benefits of tweetchats as a professional development tool should be explored by more individuals and organisations seeking skills development, as well as those trying to overcome barriers to social media engagement by students and qualified professionals. The results may also be applicable to other tweetchat communities.

Also its the valuable CPD opportunity that it creates, making me think more about topics that I otherwise might

As President of @WCPT1951 one source to hear, learn about aspects of PT I am not familiar with, key to how I work

Use for networking - reaching out and also just following 'threads'. Have made some great contacts via #Physiotalk

#Physiotalk = gr8 way of sharing research & published evidence for learning & strategic influencing

#physiotalk
The future?

Opportunity to interact with a wide group of professionals. Good way to highlight our network & specialty

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Acknowledgements: We would like to thank all our participants for their contributions to the tweetchat focus group

