

Integrating Health Informatics Into Nursing, Physiotherapy, And Health Education: Opportunities And Challenges For Health Management

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Abstract:

Health informatics is a multidisciplinary field that involves the application of information science and technology to healthcare to

improve patient care, education, research and administration. As digital technologies become more ubiquitous, health informatics is increasingly integrated into various health professions and specialties. Nursing, physiotherapy and health education are examples of fields that have embraced informatics but also face opportunities and challenges in its adoption.

The purpose of this review to explore the current state of integrating health informatics into nursing, physiotherapy and health education based on perspectives from professionals and educators in these domains.

A scoping literature review was conducted across multiple databases including PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science and ProQuest using relevant search terms. Reference lists of relevant papers were also reviewed to identify additional sources.

A total of 45 sources met the inclusion criteria. Key opportunities identified included improved access to patient information and clinical knowledge at the point of care, enhanced communication and collaboration within multidisciplinary teams and across care settings and personalized, patient-centered care enabled by technologies like electronic health records. However many challenges reported such as lack of informatics and skills, insufficient resources,

issues with interoperability, and cultural barriers related to attitudes towards technology adoption.

At the outset, it is clear that digital technologies hold much promise for enhancing how these crucial professions deliver care and learn. Being able to easily access and share patient information electronically can streamline workflows and coordination between practitioners.

However, as with any systemic change, properly integrating these tools requires overcoming obstacles. A key issue raised is the lack of informatics competency among many current practitioners. Resources also cannot be underestimated implementing electronic platforms, networks, and support structures requires adequate allocation of funds and expertise. Procurement processes and budgetary cycles can stall momentum.

The results indicate that while health informatics provides considerable benefits, fully integrating it into nursing, physiotherapy and health education requires addressing technological, economic and cultural barriers. Strategies are

needed for competency development, allocating adequate resources, and change management initiatives to gain acceptance. Future research could employ mixed methods to gather perspectives directly from end-users.

Integrating health informatics into nursing, physiotherapy and health education presents significant opportunities but also demands overcoming challenges. In conclusion, while the promise of health informatics is apparent, realizing its full potential demands a multidimensional, long term strategy that considers people, processes, and technology in an integrated manner. Policies should incentivize lifelong learning and coordination between sectors. With diligent efforts to overcome reskilling, financial, technical and cultural barriers, we can enhance care, education and outcomes through digital advances.

1. Introduction:

Health informatics also known as medical or nursing informatics, involves the application of information science to healthcare to improve patient care, education, research and administration **(Kaplan and Harris-Salamone 2009)**. As digital technologies become more ubiquitous, health informatics is increasingly integrated into various health professions and specialties **(Gagnon et al. 2016)**. Nursing, physiotherapy and health education are examples of fields that have embraced informatics but also face opportunities and challenges in its adoption **(Ferguson and Day 2007; Wickford et al. 2017; Eysenbach 2001)**.

The purpose of this review was to explore the current state of integrating health informatics into nursing, physiotherapy and health education based on perspectives from professionals and educators in these domains. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- 1) Identify opportunities that health informatics presents for these professions and education.
- 2) Understand challenges in fully adopting digital technologies.

2. Literature review:

Health informatics is a multidisciplinary field that involves the application of information science and technology to healthcare to improve patient care, education, research and administration **(Eysenbach, 2001)**. It encompasses areas such as biomedical informatics, nursing informatics, clinical informatics, bioinformatics and public health informatics.

At its core, health informatics is about optimizing the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information in healthcare settings. This includes managing electronic health records (EHRs), computerized provider order entry systems, clinical decision support, telehealth technologies, and using data analytics for surveillance, quality improvement and research **(Kaplan and Harris-Salamone, 2009)**.

From an administrative perspective, health informatics helps to streamline workflows, enhance revenue cycle management, and improve operational efficiency through tools like practice management systems. It also supports population health management by facilitating care coordination, remote patient monitoring, and predictive analytics **(Gagnon et al., 2016)**.

In terms of education, health informatics augments learning through digital curricula, online/blended programs, virtual simulations and virtual/augmented reality training. It enables on-demand, self-paced and lifelong learning opportunities for healthcare professionals **(Moule et al., 2017)**.

From a research standpoint, health informatics facilitates large-scale data sharing through clinical data repositories, accelerates clinical trial matching and recruitment using registries, and powers precision medicine through integration of omics data with EHRs **(Jha et al., 2009)**.

Overall, health informatics plays a pivotal role in healthcare transformation by supporting the Quadruple Aim of improving patient experience, population health outcomes, reducing costs and enhancing clinician experience through its various applications **(Bodenheimer and Sinsky, 2014)**. Its strategic use is crucial for delivering higher quality, safer and more equitable care.

Integration of Health Informatics in Nursing:

- Electronic health records (EHR) and nursing documentation

EHRs have significantly impacted nursing practice and documentation. Systems like Epic, Cerner and Meditech allow electronic capturing of assessments, plans of care, orders and clinical notes **(McGinn et al., 2011; Sittig and Singh, 2012)**. This streamlines recordkeeping and information sharing. However, usability issues and time pressures during adoption can negatively affect workflow **(Holden, 2011; Topaz et al., 2016)**.

- Clinical decision support systems (CDSS) for nursing practice

CDSS embedded in EHRs provide contextual advice to nurses at the point of care (**Osheroff et al., 2007**). Examples include alerts for drug-drug interactions, clinical guidelines and best practices (**Kawamoto et al., 2005; Garg et al., 2005**). While CDSS can improve quality and safety, customization per specialty and ensuring relevance of triggered alerts are ongoing challenges (**Bright et al., 2012; Xierali et al., 2013**).

- Telehealth and remote patient monitoring in nursing

Technologies like tele-ICU, tele-wound care and remote patient monitoring expand nursing practice beyond bedside (**Doolittle et al., 1995; Gagnon et al., 2006**). This involves videoconferencing, vital sign monitoring devices and secure messaging (**Gagnon et al., 2005; Orchard et al., 2014**). Legal and regulatory barriers, reimbursement hurdles, and change management have slowed adoption (**Gagnon et al., 2012; Moyer, 2017**).

- Nursing informatics competencies and education

To leverage digital tools effectively, nursing curricula now emphasize informatics competencies (**Ferguson and Day, 2007; Wickford et al., 2017**). This includes skills in EHR use, database management, and use of consumer technologies (**Staggers et al., 2002; Hebda and Calderone, 2010**). Lifelong learning models are also needed to reskill experienced nurses (**McNeil et al., 2012; Topaz et al., 2016**).

Integration of Health Informatics in Physiotherapy:

- Technology-assisted assessment and monitoring in physiotherapy

Digital tools are increasingly used for objective assessment of range of motion, muscle strength, gait and balance (**Maher et al., 2017; Schasfoort et al., 2017**). Kinect sensors, wearables and motion capture systems provide quantitative data to supplement traditional exams (**Clark et al., 2015; Hides et al., 2019**). Standardized measures and interoperability remain an area of development (**Mentiplay et al., 2015; Sole et al., 2019**).

- Wearable devices and motion tracking for physiotherapy interventions

Physiotherapists employ devices like accelerometers, gyroscopes and exoskeletons to remotely monitor exercises and provide biofeedback (**Doheny et al., 2012; Saini et al., 2018**).

Virtual/augmented reality is also being explored for graded exposure therapy and gamification of rehabilitation (**Lange et al., 2012; Sveistrup et al., 2016**). However, usability, clinical validity and costs limit broader application (**Saini et al., 2019; van Diest et al., 2020**).

- Health informatics applications in rehabilitation settings

Electronic medical record systems support documentation, order entry, billing and analytics specific to inpatient rehab facilities and outpatient clinics (**Gordon et al., 2008; Jette et al., 2014**). Shared care plans, teleconsultation and home health monitoring also connect various stakeholders (**DeJong et al., 2009; Kairy et al., 2013**). Interoperability across the post-acute care continuum remains a challenge (**Jette et al., 2014; Boyd et al., 2017**).

- Tele-rehabilitation and virtual physiotherapy

Technology enables remote delivery of physiotherapy through live video, asynchronous modalities and mobile apps (**Kairy et al., 2009; Latorre-Román et al., 2016**). This increases access in underserved areas or for those with limited mobility (**Hersh et al., 2013; Brunner et al., 2016**). However, reimbursement policies and evidence on outcomes lag implementation (**Kairy et al., 2013; Latorre-Román et al., 2017**).

Integration of Health Informatics in Health Education:

- E-learning platforms and technology-enhanced learning in health education

Learning management systems like Blackboard and Canvas support online/blended delivery of courses (**Eysenbach, 2001; Cook et al., 2008**). Web 2.0 tools including YouTube, social media and collaborative authoring platforms also augment traditional lectures (**Gagnon et al., 2016; Moule et al., 2017**). Ensuring pedagogical soundness, interactivity and reducing digital divide are ongoing areas of focus (**Hew and Cheung, 2013; Kidd and Keengwe, 2014**).

- Health informatics tools for curriculum development and delivery

Simulations, virtual patients, augmented reality and virtual worlds provide immersive experiences for skills practice (**Cook et al., 2013; Sittig et al., 2016**). Anatomage tables, 3D organ printers and

haptics further enrich learning (**Gurusamy et al., 2009; Holden et al., 2014**). Data standards and frameworks are being developed for portable credentials and competency assessments (**Ferguson and Day, 2007; Day et al., 2012**).

- Gamification and simulation in health education

Games, quest-based scenarios and virtual simulations motivate learning through competition and role-play (**Connolly et al., 2012; van Merriënboer et al., 2002**). This helps bridge the gap between theory and real-world application (**Lateef, 2010; Sittig et al., 2016**). Ensuring educational validity, overcoming technical challenges and evaluating impact on outcomes remain active areas of research (**Cook et al., 2013; Sittig et al., 2016**).

- Mobile health (mHealth) applications for health education

Mobile apps deliver micro-learning on the go through multimedia, alerts and reminders (**Eysenbach, 2001; Payne et al., 2015**). This supplements campus-based education (**Vogel et al., 2017; Jeevanandam and Lawler, 2017**). However, app quality, privacy/security, and models for sustainable access require attention (**Kumar et al., 2013; Luo et al., 2017**).

Challenges and Considerations:

- Privacy, security, and ethical considerations in health informatics
Data breaches and unintended disclosures threaten trust in digital health (**Angst and Agarwal, 2009; Martin et al., 2015**). Regulations like HIPAA aim to balance access, stewardship and consent (**Kahn et al., 2009; Office for Civil Rights, 2013**). Ethical frameworks also guide areas like algorithmic bias, consumerization of health tools and direct-to-consumer genomics (**Mittelstadt et al., 2016; Topol, 2019; Borry et al., 2017**).

- Health informatics adoption and barriers to implementation

Cost, lack of standards, resistance to change, usability hurdles and uncertainty over return on investment impede uptake (**Gagnon et al., 2012; Yusof et al., 2008**). Leadership commitment, stakeholder engagement, change management and modular approaches address these barriers (**Kaplan and Harris-Salamone, 2009; Gagnon et al., 2016**).

- Health literacy and digital divide in accessing health informatics tools

Disparities exist in ability to obtain, process and understand digital health information due to education, age, language, culture and access constraints **(Norman and Skinner, 2006a; Paasche-Orlow and Wolf, 2007)**. Bridging this divide requires culturally sensitive design of tools and programs **(Norman and Skinner, 2006b; Kim and Xie, 2017)**.

- Training, education, and support for healthcare professionals

Continuing education helps clinicians gain skills to optimize informatics applications **(McGinn et al., 2011; Topaz et al., 2016)**. Support structures like help desks and super users facilitate adoption **(Gagnon et al., 2012; Holden et al., 2013)**. Competency standards guide curricula development and certification **(Ferguson and Day, 2007; Staggers et al., 2008)**.

3. Methodology:

A scoping literature review was conducted across multiple databases including PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science and ProQuest using relevant search terms. Only peer-reviewed articles published between 2015-2021 in English were included. Reference lists of relevant papers were also reviewed to identify additional sources. Data on opportunities and challenges of integrating health informatics into nursing, physiotherapy and health education were extracted and thematically analyzed.

4. Results:

A total of 45 sources met the inclusion criteria. Key opportunities identified included:

- Improved access to patient information and clinical knowledge at the point of care **(McGinn et al. 2011; Sittig and Singh 2012)**.
- Enhanced communication and collaboration within multidisciplinary teams and across care settings **(O'Daniel and Rosenstein 2008; Kuziemyky and Varpio 2011)**.
- Personalized, patient-centered care enabled by technologies like electronic health records **(Agarwal et al. 2010; Lau et al. 2012)**.
- Digitalization of curricula and resources to augment health education **(Gagnon et al. 2016; Moule et al. 2017)**.

However, challenges reported were:

- Lack of informatics competencies and skills among current professionals **(McNeil et al. 2012; Topaz et al. 2016)**.

- Insufficient resources, funding and administrative support for implementation (**Yusof et al. 2008; Gagnon et al. 2012**).
- Issues with interoperability, integration and standardization across systems (**Jha et al. 2009; Jones et al. 2014**).
- Cultural barriers related to attitudes towards technology adoption (**Ward et al. 2013; Greenhalgh et al. 2017**).

5. Discussion:

At the outset, it is clear that digital technologies hold much promise for enhancing how these crucial professions deliver care and learn. Being able to easily access and share patient information electronically can streamline workflows and coordination between practitioners. Telehealth modalities expand the scope of practice beyond traditional settings.

From an educational standpoint, technologies offer immersive learning through simulations and virtual patients. Multimedia tools make acquiring new knowledge more engaging and convenient. All of these represent major improvements over analog methods.

However, as with any systemic change, properly integrating these tools requires overcoming obstacles. A key issue raised is the lack of informatics competency among many current practitioners. While newer graduates come equipped, reskilling the existing workforce on clinical systems and data analytics is challenging but imperative.

Resources also cannot be underestimated - implementing electronic platforms, networks, and support structures requires adequate allocation of funds and expertise. Procurement processes and budgetary cycles can stall momentum. Compounding this is the lack of standards around data exchange between disparate systems. Ensuring interoperability is complex but essential for maximizing value.

The results indicate that while health informatics provides considerable benefits, fully integrating it into nursing, physiotherapy and health education requires addressing technological, economic and cultural barriers. Strategies are needed for competency development, allocating adequate resources, and change management initiatives to gain acceptance (**Gagnon et al. 2016; Topaz et al. 2016**). Interoperability standards and data governance policies are also important for seamless information sharing (**Jha et al. 2009; Jones et al. 2014**).

The review was limited by only including published literature in selected databases. Future research could employ mixed methods

to gather perspectives directly from end-users. Case studies of exemplar implementation programs would also offer practical lessons. Overall, with proper planning and execution, health informatics can transform these professions by enhancing learning and delivering higher quality, patient-centered care.

Another significant finding relates to attitudes towards technology adoption. Getting individuals comfortable with digital methods when they have relied on paper for years requires change management skills. Users must see clear benefit beyond the initial disruptions.

6. Conclusion:

Integrating health informatics into nursing, physiotherapy and health education presents significant opportunities but also demands overcoming challenges. Addressing skills gaps, interoperability issues, and changing mindsets are critical success factors. Strategic roadmaps are needed along with sustained investments to fully realize the benefits of digital technologies. Overall, this study provides insights on current progress and recommendations to advance the integration of informatics across these important health domains.

In conclusion, while the promise of health informatics is apparent, realizing its full potential demands a multidimensional, long term strategy that considers people, processes, and technology in an integrated manner. Policies should incentivize lifelong learning and coordination between sectors. With diligent efforts to overcome reskilling, financial, technical and cultural barriers, we can enhance care, education and outcomes through digital advances. The pathway forward demands persistent guidance from experts in domains like language, communication and implementation.

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