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## Overcoming barriers to virtual care

Adjusting to life after a stroke can be difficult for patients and their caregivers, with many survivors eager to utilize services to aid their recovery. That's true for many of the patients of St. Joseph's Stroke Rehabilitation Program at Parkwood Institute says Karen Heys, Intake Support Specialist for the program's outpatient services, the Community Stroke Rehabilitation Team (CSRT) and Comprehensive Outpatient Rehabilitation Program (CORP). "Our patients want to participate in their rehabilitation and they know how important their exercises and therapies are to getting healthier."



Typically, patients referred to CSRT and CORP are able to start their programs right away, but due to the pandemic restrictions, in-person rehabilitation services were limited to protect everyone from the possible spread of COVID-19. Therapy sessions moved online to virtual settings, presenting new challenges for patient access to care.

"Our patient population is typically older adults who don't necessarily have the tools or training to use technology and navigate virtual care," adds Karen. "At first, when we moved to virtual care, our therapists were having to coach patients and caregivers on how to use the online system, taking precious time away from their rehab instruction. This was challenging for both the patients and the team."

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Our outpatient stroke rehab team developed a partnership with Connected Canadians, a non-profit organization that pairs volunteers with older adults for free-of-charge digital skills training and support. Since then, Connected Canadians has helped countless stroke patients become comfortable with the technology needed to participate in their virtual rehabilitation. "It's been a huge time saver for us, saving patient visits to support their recovery, instead of figuring out the virtual platform. It's also helped these patients and caregivers access visits with other health care providers needed for their care, who have also mostly moved to virtual services."

As health care continues to adopt and expand virtual access to services, partnerships with organizations like Connected Canadians have illustrated how care teams can receive ongoing, reliable telehealth support for their patients at home and in the community. Visit [Connected Canadians online](#) to learn more.



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