UNDERSTANDING THE REACH OF A PHYSIOTHERAPY TWEETCHAT COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION
The professional use of social media by physiotherapists and other health healthcare professionals has gained increasing acceptance and recognition over the past 3 years.

Physiotalk launched as a designated twitter community for physiotherapists in December 2013, supported by a website and Facebook page. Run by volunteers it holds fortnightly tweetchats on a range of healthcare topics aimed at physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers but often attracting a wider audience.

The tweetchats are hosted by the Physiotalk team or guest hosts using #physiotalk or alternative hashtag to bind the discussion. Pre-chat information is posted on the website for all tweetchats, which sets out the aims and focus for the discussion. Each tweetchat lasts for 1 hour and a transcript is added afterwards, which provides a record for future reference. Discussions cover a diverse range of areas including clinical, service, professional and policy development topics. An evaluation of the digital activity associated with Physiotalk’s first 2 years was carried out February 2016.

METHODS
The evaluation was carried out in February 2016 and used 4 freely available analytical tools: Symplur (hashtag analytics), WordPress (website activity), Tweepsmap (location of followers) and Twitter analytics (growth of followers).

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHYSIOTALK TWEETCHATS</th>
<th>#PHYSIOTALK HASHTAG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61 tweetchats</td>
<td>4991 #physiotalk was used by 4991 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 99 people per tweetchat</td>
<td>In 39,069 tweets</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 people per tweetchat on average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 Guest hosts</td>
<td></td>
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| 12,592 @physiotalk followers* | From 113 countries | 18 countries with more than 50 followers | Average growth of 557 followers a month |

DISCUSSION
Physiotalk has created a significant digital community with a global reach despite being UK-based, self-organised and without ongoing funding. The tweetchats have provided regular opportunities for physiotherapists, healthcare professionals and members of the public to discuss areas of practice and service development in a semi-structured format that crosses organisational, geographical and hierarchical boundaries.

The evaluation has also identified 2 main areas for further review and development. Firstly, a relatively small number of followers take part in each tweetchat. The phenomenon of ‘lurking’ is well known on Twitter. Followers watch the tweetchat in real time, or view the transcript afterwards, but do not actively participate. This may lead to underestimation of activity as these individuals are not represented in hashtag analytics.

Secondly, despite followers and website views from a number of countries, active participation in tweetchats from outside the UK is relatively low. This may be due to time zone limitations during a live chat, language barriers or our use of a ‘.co.uk’ website.

Physiotalk continues to grow and as of October 2016 had 15,937 followers from 124 countries. #physiotalk has now been used by 5,937 people in 48,367 tweets creating 100,835,769 impressions.

NEXT STEPS
1. The team will explore approaches to:
   - Increase participation in tweetchats by international participants.
   - Increase the proportion of Physiotalk followers who join in #physiotalk tweetchats.

2. Qualitative approach to evaluate participation in and impact of Physiotalk, in conjunction with Queen Margaret University. Results will be available in 2017.

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