Doctor-prescribed and -supervised exercise therapy is going digital. The Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) will begin piloting a ground-breaking app for Supervised Exercise Therapy (SET), for at-home use by patients with peripheral artery disease (PAD).

The SET App was introduced Thursday, June 25, during the Society’s virtual meeting, SVS ONLINE: “New Advances and Discoveries in Vascular Surgery” as part of a session on “Digital Health Advancements in Vascular Surgery.” SVS member Oliver Aalami, MD, of Stanford University and a member of the SVS Health Information Technology Task Force, is developing the app, powered by Cell-Ed, a remote learning and telehealth company.

Physicians and healthcare providers must prescribe the app, which will include health education, exercise assessment and goal-setting, and coaching. The app will help schedule exercise, monitor compliance and report feedback for later follow-up. Weekly interactions with a live coach will help guide the patient, he said.

The app works on any mobile device.

SET is a first-line therapy for PAD patients, carried out in hospitals and clinics with physicians “immediately available,” said Aalami. Therapy generally includes three sessions a week over 12 weeks, with walking alternating with resting periods, for 30 to 60 minutes. The therapy has been shown to lower the need for intervention.

However, despite its success, only 50% of providers in a 2019 survey reported referring patients to a SET program, though more than 95% would have liked to; transportation is one issue.

SVS is launching the app with 50 patients from across the United States. A national launch is planned for the final quarter of 2020. In addition, the Vascular Quality Initiative (VQI) is exploring integration for patient-recorded outcomes reporting, an exciting development, said Aalami. Reimbursement from private and federal insurers is being evaluated.

“We look forward to the participation of all SVS members … to the benefit of all patients with PAD,” he said.

The SET program includes a baseline assessment, daily walks five days a week, with podcast content and nudges, benchmark assessment at the half-way point, end-of-program assessment, health coaching throughout and optional education units and surveys

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