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## Effective long-term e-health coaching requires an empathic relationship: A qualitative interview study

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**Background:** We have shown that collaborative e-health can produce long-term lifestyle change, but the effect depends on effective and skilled healthcare professionals. How healthcare professionals perceive delivering asynchronous e-health coaching and which determinants are important to deliver successful long-term lifestyle coaching has only been briefly explored and needs to be explored.

**Objectives:** The objective of this study is to analyze how healthcare professionals perceive e-health coaching and to explore how certain determinants can influence successful long-term lifestyle change for patients undergoing hybrid e-health coaching using a collaborative e-health solution.

**Methods:** Ten healthcare professionals were recruited by purposive sampling who all had more than six months of experience providing e-health lifestyle coaching using a combination of face-to-face meetings and asynchronous e-health coaching. We performed individual, qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews in their workplace about their experience with health coaching in relation to lifestyle change.

**Results:** The healthcare professionals all found asynchronous e-health lifestyle coaching to be fundamentally different challenge from face-to-face coaching. The major reason was that unlike typical in-person encounters in healthcare did not receive immediate feedback from the patients. The respondents identified and reflected on four themes important to them: (1) combining face-to-face coaching with e-health coaching, (2) reflexion in asynchronous e-health coaching, (3) finding realistic goals based on personal barriers, and (4) being personal, staying connected and communicating in a non-judgemental manner.

**Conclusion:** Establishing and maintaining an empathic relationship is probably the sole most important factor for successful subsequent e-health coaching.