Apps for Mental Health Care: Benchmarks of Effectiveness

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By John Torous, MD [3]

A podcast on the role of randomized controlled trials in mobile mental health research.

Traditionally a benchmark of scientific evidence, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are often unsuited for the fast-paced, open environment of smartphone apps and other mobile technology research. So how can mobile health (mHealth) adapt to ensure it is evidence based and rigorously validated? Dr John Torous discusses these issues with researcher and PhD student, Jennifer Nicholas, BSc(Hons) BA.

Summarizing the main points of the interview, Ms Nicholas explains:

- The vast majority of apps for mental health are of poor scientific quality
- Current research methodologies may be contributing to the shortage of high-quality apps
- mHealth research needs to explore different ways of creating, testing, and disseminating apps

About the speakers:
Ms Nicholas studies mobile mental health, with a focus on bipolar disorders, at the Black Dog Institute in Australia. Dr Torous is a Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Senior Resident at the Harvard Longwood Psychiatry Residency Training Program in Boston. He is the Digital Psychiatry Editor for Psychiatric Times. Twitter: @JohnTorousMD. The speakers report no conflicts of interest concerning the subject matter of this podcast.

Further reading:

- An important article by Ms Nicholas on this topic: mHealth in Psychiatry: Time for Methodological Change
- Papers discussed in this podcast include A Systematic Assessment of Smartphone Tools for Suicide Prevention and Mobile Apps for Bipolar Disorder: A Systematic Review of Features and Content Quality

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