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Conference Abstract

Designing mobile tools for integrative healthcare: enhancing the patient-practitioner relationship

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Abstract

Introduction: Weight management is challenging; particularly when addressed in the context of long-term or chronic co-morbidities. For such patients, sustained lifestyle changes are often driven, administered and monitored through contact with health professionals. However, this contact is generally infrequent and thus does not map on to patients' day-to-day engagement with eating and exercise. In theory, technology may afford an opportunity here, but thus far most technological applications are focused on patient recording, monitoring and, more recently, 'buddying'. If technology is to have a role in increasing the value of the face-to-face exchange between the health professional and the patient it will need to be carefully yet simply embedded into established healthcare practice as well as the day-to-day routines of food purchase, consumption, movement and exercise. In sum, the technology must provide a meaningful extension of the professional/patient relationship. In this presentation we will show how we designed a tool to do this in the context of the relationship between dietitians and their patients. We will introduce key features of the tool, the research that informed these, and the early evaluations of the tool that have been conducted.

Aims and Objectives: We sought to (1) understand the complex context within which dietitians in weight management work, (2) work with dietitians and consumers to identify the characteristics of a tool that would enhance the value of the face-to-face consultation, (3) design a tool that met these criteria and adjust this in line with user feedback, and (4) evaluate the tool.

Methods: A programme of qualitative research with dietitians and consumers was used to inform the conceptualisation, design, development and evaluation phases. Data collection in five European countries (France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal and the United Kingdom) included face-to-face interviews, a qualitative online study, early prototype evaluations and a small in-practice evaluation.

Results: The web and mobile app myPace (<http://mypaceapp.com/>) was developed. It connects dietitians and patients between face-to-face dietetic consultations. myPace supports a scalable, integrative, 'small steps' approach to weight loss, incorporating monitoring and motivation. It incorporates relevant tenets of the behaviour change literature into its design. The tool provides a conduit for expert, relationship-based, on-going care that can be shaped to match patient needs

and adjusted as required. The patient and the dietitian can discuss the role they wish the tool to play

within the consultation. The tool's functions are fully customisable, and the degree of technological integration with established practice can be changed to match different patient and dietitian preferences. Both users can access performance data in aggregate or detailed form. myPace maps layers of data alongside each other to build an overall picture of eating, activity, weight and mood patterns for each client.

Conclusions: We have developed and evaluated a tool that can be integrated into the interface between health professionals and weight management patients. Progress has also been made in developing the business model by which this and similar applications that seek to maintain and enhance the value of the face-to-face consultation in healthcare can operate.

Keywords:

integrative healthcare, mhealth, ehealth, weight management

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