POSTER ABSTRACT

Patients’ attitudes to and experience of the use of technology in mental health in an Irish primary care setting

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Introduction: Mental health issues represent a significant proportion visits to GPs and the Health Research Board found in its survey in 2007 that people are more willing to contact a GP rather than a psychiatrist with mental health issues (Doherty et al, 2007). It is estimated that 90% of mental health issues in Ireland are addressed in general practice, with an international trend towards making mental health services available in primary care (Mental Health Reform, 2013). However, at present the mental health services, both locally in Ireland and internationally, are unable to meet the growing needs of those suffering mental ill health.

Healthcare services internationally have started looking at novel and innovative ways of bridging with widening gap between patient needs and the available mental health services. One possible option that has emerged as promising in the last 15 years is the field of e-mental health - “the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support and improve mental health, including the use of online resources, social media and smartphone applications” (Holles et al, 2015).

Although public health bodies in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have started recommending the use of e-mental health and digital resources at present there is no government policy on the matter in Ireland.

There is a growing body of evidence on this subject internationally but no published research from Ireland.

Research aims and method: The aim of this research was to explore patients’ attitudes towards and experience of the use of technology and online resources with regard to mental health. Data was gathered by means of a patient survey. Eight-point questionnaires were distributed at random and completed anonymously by 61 patients at the Carlton Clinic in Bray, Co. Wicklow, Ireland in 2017. The objectives of the questionnaire were to ascertain patients’ levels of awareness of the technology based resources available; whether they were using them; what patients’ experience of using this technology was; whether a GP had ever recommended using digital resources; and, whether patients felt it would be beneficial for GPs to recommend the use of digital resources in relation to mental health.

Results: The research showed low levels of awareness and usage with 39% of respondents aware of technology based resources and only 11% having ever used them. However, of those using these resources there was a positive response in terms of their experience using it with all finding it useful. 15% of respondents reported that a GP had recommended digital resources to them.
Perhaps the most promising finding was that 72% of those surveyed reported they would find it useful if a GP recommended digital resources to them with regard to mental health issues.

**Conclusion:** In conclusion this research shows that at present awareness and usage of digital resources amongst this primary care population is low. However, the majority of these patients appear to be positive towards and open to option of digital resources and are willing to discuss them in mental health consultations.

**Keywords:** mental health; technology; patient attitudes