

HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND SOCIAL NETWORK IN MENTAL HEALTH: A PILOT STUDY TO EVALUATE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY COMMUNICATION IN PREVENTION, MONITORING AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL DISORDERS IN TRENTO REGION

Wilma Di Napoli & Olaf Andreatta

Mental Health Department, Trento, Italy

SUMMARY

The clinical use of Information Communication Technology tools can facilitate the support of population groups at risk and / or with chronic conditions. Social networks and other forms of communication represent an opportunity to improve the quality of care and patient empowerment. The study intends to evaluate, in accordance with the dictates of the HTA, the possibilities related to the use of social networking technologies in the prevention and taking care of mental illness. On the basis of these results and in agreement with the context of the Trentino health system, several application proposals will be developed for the treatment of patients with bipolar disorder.

The conclusion of the evaluation, and the related clinical and organizational data to support the implementation process in the Trentino health system is expected in the month of October 2014.

Key words: Information Communication Technology - mental health - Health Technology Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The clinical use of Information Communication Technology tools can facilitate the support of population groups at risk and/or with chronic conditions. Social networks and other forms of communication represent an opportunity to improve the quality of care and patient empowerment.

Internet-based social networks can enable communication, information collection and sharing in the health care space. Nowadays an increasing number of people go online to research about their health and use social networks to find fellow patients and discuss their conditions before making health care decisions (Eysenbach & Jadad 2001).

OBJECTIVES

The study intends to evaluate, in accordance with the dictates of the HTA, the possibilities related to the use of social networking technologies in the prevention and taking care of mental illness. On the basis of these results and in agreement with the context of the Trentino health system, several application proposals will be developed for the treatment of patients with bipolar disorder.

METHODS

We conducted a systematic research in scientific literature about experiences of application of new technology (Smartphone, websites, social net, Blog, App) at

national and international levels, in order to analyze effectiveness and appropriateness, costs, results and ethical implications of their use.

We also conducted three focus groups and distributed questionnaires to a sample population of about 100 people with chronic psychiatric conditions in order to verify attitudes, knowledge, prejudices to the application of new technology.

MAIN CONTENTS

The effort to develop services through new Information Communication Technology (ICT) develops from the need of a spending review for the national health system and, on the other hand, from the increasing percentage of people potentially affected by some disease or mental disorder, so that health systems are driven to find more effective solutions at lower costs.

Moreover we should mention that these innovations determine big changes in general culture and models in the field of health services, because they can give users the possibility of growing skills and knowledge available to develop a greater control of their treatment choices. In particular, there are two main positive aspects: the level of information to patients and the opportunity to benefit from the support of the experiences of other people with similar disorders (Raghupathi & Tan 1999).

We can summarize at least two types of technological applications in the mental health area: products and services that improve the efficiency of

current practices (for example smartphone apps to survey mood or anxiety levels, online psychotherapy and counseling, online consultation) and technologies that will completely revolutionize the method of service delivery (patients internet networks, wiki, e-coaching by specialists).

E-services may commonly include general promotion of a healthy lifestyle, preventive intervention, consulting services by medical specialists, and support patients through chat rooms and/or online peer support.

Social networks hold considerable potential value for health care organizations because they can be used to reach stakeholders, aggregate information and leverage collaboration.

Despite the benefits of these solutions we must consider also the matters about privacy and patient security. Social networks and online support groups provide a useful tool to help patients indeed, but we should study in depth strategies and methods to ensure and protect the safety of those who are most vulnerable (think about pro anorexia or pro suicide sites). This fact underlines therefore the importance of providing online services from alternative and certified sources (Kitzmiller 2010).

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The application of new technologies in the health sector, and particularly in the mental health reality, has not yet revealed all the opportunities connected with it

and it is designed to assume increasing importance in the evolution of health care systems and clinical governance, in order to develop resources, effectiveness and more possibilities available to the community, in a social equity and patient centered perspective (Leventhal 2011).

The conclusion of the evaluation, and the related clinical and organizational data to support the implementation process in the Trentino health system of new communication technology models for the treatment of patients with bipolar disorder is expected in the month of October 2014.

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Correspondence:

Dr. ssa Wilma Di Napoli, M.D., Psychiatrist
Mental Health Department
Via Garibaldi, 9, Erba (CO), Italy
E-mail: wilmaangela.dinapoli@apss.tn.it