

CASE STUDY: GO WITH THE FLO

USING FLO AS AN INTERACTIVE INFORMATION TOOL

The Healthy Minds Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service at Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust has developed a pilot project to improve attendance at group therapy sessions by using Florence telehealth application (FLO) to text patients with reminders and prompts to help them manage their recovery. FLO is a text messaging service which uses a protocol that can be tailored to the specific needs and requirements of patients. Once patients' mobile phone numbers have been loaded into the FLO system and assigned to a protocol, text messages are automatically sent at specific times.

The service is using FLO to deliver text messages which encourage attendance and prompt service users to complete homework from the course. This intervention has made the service more productive as the number of did not attend (DNA) appointments has fallen. FLO also leads to better patient outcomes as they showed improved recovery; this has the added implication that patients require less face to face contact, resulting in cost and time savings.

Initially attendance at the group therapy sessions (e.g. Stress Class and Mood Group) was low and recovery was poor, as reported using the PHQ9 and GAD7 tools which measure depression and anxiety. Consequently the service engaged in a pilot between April and June 2014 to use FLO to support the delivery of these groups.

Key Outcomes

- For the pilot 56 people were recruited to use FLO and 72 people in the same groups did not use the technology. The DNA rate for those using FLO was 26%, compared to 41% for those not choosing to use FLO, suggesting that FLO improved attendance.
- When measuring significant improvement (a drop of 5 points on the scale), the use of FLO had a 22% improvement over the control group, showing improved patient recovery.
- The feedback from all those that used FLO was very positive. It was considered to be interactive and helpful, and the prompts to complete homework were timely and appropriate. The following quotes obtained from patients who used FLO support this:

"Flo really helped me to remember to practise and think about what I was learning in between group therapy sessions"
Male, 59 years old - Attended Stress Class

"I really enjoyed attending the mood group and the Flo service added to the experience"
Female, 59 years old - Attended Mood Group

- Staff have enjoyed the opportunity to use technology to support the delivery of more traditional support, as well as achieving greater satisfaction knowing that more of their patients are attending sessions and getting better.



- It has been suggested that with more patients attending group therapy sessions and receiving additional support from FLO that they are less likely to deteriorate and the likelihood of seeking further medical intervention decreases, saving time and money.
- FLO has the potential to significantly improve productivity because more patients can be seen in a shorter amount of time. At the group sessions approximately 12 people can access support simultaneously. For 1:1 sessions only 2 patients can be seen in this time. If FLO can increase attendance at group sessions it can improve productivity and potentially reduce waiting times.

Background

Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust provides community and mental health services in Oldham, Bury, Rochdale, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford, employing over 6,000 staff. The Healthy Minds IAPT service is for people over the age of 16 years who are experiencing symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, low mood/depression, stress, worry or anxiety, feelings of hopelessness or panic attacks. It also offers help to those dealing with the effects of a long-term health problem or chronic pain, postnatal depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, phobias, or eating difficulties. The service is delivered by a range of professionals including therapists and counsellors, who utilise a variety of treatment methods from group workshops to online or telephone based courses, or individual therapy sessions.

The service had increased the number of interventions delivered via the group sessions but were struggling with attendance figures and with patients' recovery results. FLO has been utilised by other services such as diabetes and health improvement services, such as smoking cessation, and so the team were interested to see if the technology could be used to support their service delivery to improve outcomes and reduce non-attendance.

Key Aims

The primary aim of the project was to see if the implementation of FLO improved commencement and completion of stress and anxiety groups and low mood/depression groups delivered by psychological wellbeing practitioners.

Key Stages of Set-up

The service worked with the Staffordshire FLO team who helped support the writing of the protocols and the project went live between April and June 2014.

How it Works

Currently, when a patient is referred to the Healthy Minds service they are invited to attend a screening session where they are provided with details of the treatment options

available, but during the pilot all stage two referrals were automatically routed through a group. Patients who attended either a stress class or mood group between April-June 2014 were given the option of signing up for FLO.

Patients who didn't sign up to FLO simply completed the groups as usual and were used as a control group, but those that did received text messages prior to the commencement of their group and also during their course of treatment to build on the in-session work:

- a text message was sent each day for the seven days leading up to the commencement of the groups (the aim was to try and reduce anxiety re attendance and improve motivation)
- further texts sent on day two and day five after each session, reminding patients about what had been covered in the sessions and their homework
- after each initial text patients could press # up to five times to receive additional information – each subsequent text builds on the previous one

Examples

Pre-course:

'Well done on signing up for stress class. You have taken your first step towards recovery and we look forward to seeing you on [date]'

'Don't forget that your group starts tomorrow. It's normal to feel anxious, but we are here to support you and we look forward to meeting you'

'1 in 4 people will suffer from a common mental health problem at some time in their lives – you are not alone'

After session 1:

'Don't forget to have a go at drawing out your own ABC-E model of emotion' (if # is pressed the patient receives the next message below)

'Think about what physical symptoms you might notice – have you noticed changes to your sleep or appetite for example?' (if # is pressed the patient receives the next message below)

'What might have changed in your behaviour? Are there things that you have stopped doing recently or have been avoiding?' (if # is pressed the patient receives the next message below)

'What have your thoughts been lately? About yourself, other people and the world?'

Once the session has been completed, no further text messages are sent and the person is no longer signed up to FLO.

Resources

As the system has been grown from an NHS provider, the cost to Pennine Care was relatively low, with licence costs of around £11,000 shared across the Trust footprint. Due to the direct benefits that were incurred following implementation of the system, such as the reduction in DNA appointments at £28 per session, it was found to be an effective use of financial resources.

The scale by which FLO is used varies between service users depending on individual need – in this case, how many messages they opt to receive. The cost of the additional telehealth service, which usually runs for eight weeks alongside face-to-face group sessions, is between £2.08 (minimum use) and £16.48 (maximum use) per person. Service users utilise their own mobile phone, which maximises the personal nature of the information delivered and the cost to the user is nil. The total project spend was £215.04 although this has the potential to both increase and decrease from £174.72 to £309.12 depending on how many of the additional texts were used.

Personnel resources were identified from within the team. It was noted that the initial set-up could take some time, but that the ongoing use and running of Flo as a telehealth system was time-efficient. The Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners were the only staff group involved in this pilot although system spread will involve all IAPT group practitioners going forward. The total project time was 4 months.

Key Challenges

Writing and amending of the protocols was the main challenge as this was time consuming. This issue was easily overcome by identifying a specific project manager who had dedicated time to build the protocols. Over time, as staff became more comfortable and familiar with the system this became less of an issue anyway.

Key Learning

The use of FLO is an effective tool to increase the attendance at group therapy sessions and to improve patients' recovery.

Sustainability

The team is now rolling out FLO to all group interventions delivered within the service.

Next steps

A partnership with the University of Manchester and the Trust's research team has formed to put in a bid for funding to carry out a randomised controlled trial (RCT) on a much larger scale so that we can fully assess the impact and usefulness of FLO.

Supporting Material

- Appendix 1 – PHQ9 / GAD 7 measures

Relevant websites

- [Improving Access to Psychological Therapies](#)
- [Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust](#)
- [Tameside and Glossop Healthy Minds](#)
- [Florence](#)

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