Online Therapy Shows Promise for Fighting Depression

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Mental health treatment via the Internet can yield positive results, according to a doctoral dissertation presented at the School of Health and Medical Science of Orebro University and reported by ScienceDaily.

For the study, researchers divided patients treated for depression into two groups. The control group received no additional therapy, and an experimental group received cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) online from a therapist. The result? Only 10 percent of those who received Internet therapy relapsed into depression, compared with 38 percent of those in the control group.

“The purpose of Internet-based treatment is not to replace traditional therapy, face-to-face, for those who need it,” said the dissertation’s author, psychologist Fredrik Hollandare, MSc. “But for many people it is an equally good, even better, alternative, since they can choose their own time and place.”

In addition to the convenience factor, online therapy sessions take up less time; a course of treatment totals between 2 and 2.5 hours, while traditional CBT entails 10 to 15 weekly, 45-minute sessions—about 7 to 11 hours total.

Online sessions allow therapists to see roughly four times as many people as they could in live sessions, so fewer patients get placed on a waiting list.

Hollandare stressed that much of CBT’s value lies in therapists teaching their patients principles to follow on their own each day. Patients can learn these principles via the Internet as well as in person.

What’s important is not the therapist, Hollandare said. It’s the specific methods that are the CBT core, and patients can learn them in many different ways.

Click here to read how a CBT therapist’s competency level affects the treatment’s effectiveness.

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