

mHealth ineffective for depression prevention

Summarised by Dr. Jessica K Edwards

A universal cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)-based mobile messaging programme (MEMO CBT) designed to prevent teenage onset depression provides no clinical benefit, according to results of a double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trial (ACTRN12609000405213). A total of 855 students (recruited from 15 schools across Auckland, New Zealand) received text and multimedia mobile-phone messages for 9 weeks based on key principals of CBT (MEMO CBT) or unrelated content (MEMO control). No significant differences in primary (CDRS-R score) or secondary (including RADS-2, MFQ or PQ-LES-Q scores) outcomes were identified between the two groups at 12 months follow-up. The researchers suggest that the healthiness of the participants and the low level of CBT exposure may have contributed to these negative findings. Further work is required to demonstrate the value of universal prevention interventions via mHealth modalities for depression.

Whittaker, R., Stasiak, K., McDowell, H., Doherty, I., Shepherd, M., Chua, S., Dorey, E., Parag, V., Ameratunga, S., Rodgers, A. & Merry, S. (2017), MEMO: an mHealth intervention to prevent the onset of depression in adolescents: a double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trial. J Child Psychol Psychiatr, 58:1014-1022. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12753