

# Harnessing the potential of digital technology for remote interventions with young people

By Dr. Jessica Edwards

Researchers in the UK have expressed their views to *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, on the value of remote therapist support and digital technology for children and young people with mental health problems. In their article, Charlotte Sanderson and colleagues explain that there is good empirical evidence supporting that digital interventions can be clinically effective. They highlight that in some cases the effect sizes for short and medium-term outcomes are almost equivalent to those derived from face-to-face treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Sanderson *et al.* discuss that as well as the lower cost compared to face-to-face therapy, remote support can help fill a gap where clinical contact is not available or is difficult to reach. Yet despite its advantages, the researchers concede that there is still a way to go to promote public and clinician acceptance of online interventions. Typical fears of young people include the perception that online treatments are impersonal or inflexible, and concerns of clinicians include difficulty managing risk. A blended approach might therefore,



be a suitable option. Here, online support is delivered alongside face-to-face treatment. Some preliminary data already support such a blended treatment approach.<sup>2</sup>

The value and utility of online interventions is becoming apparent in light of the current coronavirus pandemic. “The coronavirus crisis, certainly in the short term, has served as a catalyst for the online therapy movement, with a sudden surge in need for services to embrace video and teletherapy”, says Sanderson. “It will be interesting to see how this impacts on wider acceptance of online delivery in the longer-term, both for the public and service-providers”.

Overall, online interventions still represent a paradigm shift in how mental health care is conceptualised. Going forward, the researchers hope that services reflect on comparative outcomes and uptake of therapies that have shifted to online delivery to inform future service delivery and evidence based practice.

## Referring to:

Sanderson, C., Kouzoupi, N. & Hall, C.L. (2020), *Technology Matters: The human touch in a digital age – a blended approach in mental healthcare delivery with children and young people*. *Child Adolesc. Ment. Health*. doi: 10.1111/camh.12385.

## References:

<sup>1</sup>Hollis, C. *et al.* (2017), *Annual Research Review: Digital health interventions for children and young people with mental health problems—a systematic and meta-review*. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr.* 58: 474–503. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.12663.

<sup>2</sup>Erbe, D. *et al.* (2017), *Blending face-to-face and internet-based interventions for the treatment of mental disorders in adults: Systematic review*. *J. Med. Internet. Res.* 19: e306. doi: 10.2196/jmir.6588.