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Evaluating Internet Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Adults with Depression

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Abstract

- Depression is one of the most prevalent and costly mental health issues worldwide.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been a long-standing treatment for patients with depression. CBT has been proven to reduce or eliminate depression symptoms while increasing quality of life.
- Due to lack of access to care and a deficiency of mental health providers throughout the United States, the frequent and lengthy visits that are required for traditional CBT may not be an option.
- The use of internet based CBT has been studied as an alternative to traditional therapy and may serve to fill a gap in current care.
- This review of literature examined the use of internet based forms of CBT in patients ages 18 and older.
- Internet based forms reviewed included videoconferencing, computer based therapy and smartphone applications.
- Current research was examined to determine the safety of internet based CBT and compare the costs and outcomes to in-person therapy.

Introduction

- Depression affects approximately 16 million adults in the United States each year (National Institute of Mental Health, 2006).
- The yearly cost of depression treatment in the United States is estimated at $81 billion dollars (Gossan et al. 2016).
- Finding ways to control costs associated with depression while maintaining positive outcomes is imperative.
- With the current shortage of psychiatric care providers, the need for alternative methods of treatment that increase access to care is apparent.

Statement of the Problem

- When considering the number of people affected by depression, along with the cost of treatment for those individuals, it becomes apparent that finding cost effective solutions that improve access to care is imperative.

Research Questions

- In the adult psychiatric population (age 18 and older), is internet based CBT a safe alternative to traditional in-person treatment when treating depression?
- Among adult patients being treated with internet based CBT for depression, how did the cost of telepsychiatric treatment compare to traditional treatment cost?
- Does the use of internet based CBT improve outcomes in those patient populations?

Literature Review

Etiology and Symptoms of Depression

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2013), depression occurs more often in females than males. There is a familial tendency. Depression can occur in response to a negative life stressor, although there is not always a clear event preceding onset. Depressive symptoms can be mild or severe enough to interfere with daily life functions.

Diagnosing Depression

Guidelines for diagnosing depression from the APA (2013)

The patient must experience at least five of the following symptoms in the same 2-week time frame and one symptom must be depression or anhedonia.

- Depression.
- Anhedonia.
- Unintended weight loss or gain of more than 5% in one month.
- An inability to sleep or sleeping too much.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- A sense of guilt or diminished sense of self-worth.
- Problems concentrating.
- Psychomotor agitation or impairment.
- Thoughts of death or contemplating suicide.

Treatment of Depression

- Treatment can include psychotherapy and antidepressant medication.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy is an effective form of psychotherapy that is frequently used.
- CBT assists patients in developing insight into the negative thoughts and feelings that contribute to their depressive symptoms.
- CBT assists patients in developing skills to deal with depression symptoms and their precipitating factors.
- Traditional, in-person CBT can take up to 50 minutes per session (Martin, 2016) and usually lasts 12-16 weeks.
- Lengthy in-person CBT can pose a barrier to patients who live in remote areas, lack transportation, or have scheduling issues.
- Internet based CBT could be more convenient.
- The use of internet based CBT could help to eliminate barriers to treatment.

Defining Telepsychiatry and Determining Treatment Guidelines

- Telepsychiatry is the use of electronic technologies to provide mental health care from a distance.
- Telepsychiatry can be delivered through forms such as videoconferencing, telephone, e-mail, and smartphone applications.
- Over 50% of Americans own a smartphone and more than 80% use a computer on a regular basis, making electronic delivery of CBT a realistic alternative to in-person treatment (Benton et al. 2016).
- The use of telepsychiatry has limitations for use, safety issues, privacy issues and legal implications that providers should be familiar with.

Discussion

- The use of internet based CBT for the treatment of depression in adults has been shown to be safe.
- Of the 5 articles reviewed that addressed patient outcomes, no adverse events were reported with the use of internet based CBT.
- The videoconferencing and computer based CBT reviewed were delivered by trained therapists.
- The smartphone applications were developed by trained mental health professionals.
- Patients were screened for appropriateness prior to treatment.
- Patients were excluded from internet CBT studies for reasons such as severe depression or multiple psychiatric conditions.

Applicability to Clinical Practice

- The use of internet based delivery of CBT has been shown to be safe and cost effective, with outcomes equivalent to in-person therapy.
- The studies in the review showed a reduction in therapy time with the use of internet based CBT compared to in-person therapy.
- Patients concerned about internet based CBT included a possible lack of a therapeutic relationship and difficulty communicating (Beatte, Shaw, Kaur, & Kessler, 2009).

References


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