Websites offering information about depression or cognitive behaviour therapy reduced depressive symptoms


Clinical impact ratings GP/FP/Primary care ★★★★★☆ Mental health ★★★★★☆ Psychiatry ★★★★★☆

Q In community dwelling patients with depression, do websites offering information about depression or cognitive therapy reduce depressive symptoms?

METHODS

Design: randomised controlled trial.

Allocation: (concealed)†.

Blinding: unblinded *.

Follow up period: 6 weeks of intervention.

Setting: Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia.

Patients: 525 patients 18–52 years of age (mean age 36 y, 71% women) with access to the internet who had symptoms of depression (Kessler Psychological Distress Scale score >=22) but were not receiving clinical care from either a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Interventions: (1) a website offering information about depression (BluePages, http://bluepages.anu.edu.au) (n = 165) or (2) cognitive behaviour therapy (MoodGYM, http://moodgym.anu.edu.au) (n = 182), or (3) an "attention placebo" (control) (n = 178). Patients in the BluePages and MoodGYM groups received directions on how to use the websites (by phone or email) and detailed guides outlining navigation and weekly assignments. Patients in the control group were called once a week to discuss lifestyle and environmental factors that may have had an influence on depression.

Outcomes: measures of symptom change (0–60 Center for Epidemiologic Studies depression scale with scores >=16 reflecting clinical depression).

Patient follow up: 83% (intention to treat analysis).

*See glossary.
†Information provided by author.

MAIN RESULTS

At 6 weeks, reduction in symptoms of depression was small but statistically significantly greater in both the BluePages and MoodGYM groups than in the control group (table).

CONCLUSION

In community dwelling patients with depression, websites offering information about depression or cognitive therapy reduced depressive symptoms.

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