

Mental Well-Being: Telepsychiatry

Today, we are more connected to people than we have ever been. Technology allows us to send a message to someone on the

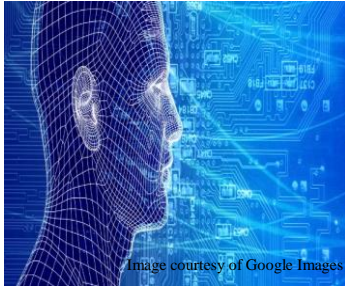


Image courtesy of Google Images

other side of the world in a matter of seconds; it allows us to share photos with family and friends on social networking sites and to talk face-to-face with someone in another time zone. Although technology has found a way to connect us, often for entertainment purposes, it has also found a way to improve our health.

One of the biggest hurdles of accessing mental health treatment can be long wait times to see a provider, especially when it comes to psychiatry. Shortage of providers, especially in rural areas, is a very real problem that many areas face. But advances in technology and in the medical field have found a way to overcome this barrier by giving us the answer in telemedicine, and more specifically telepsychiatry.

The following is information that one of the Community Adult Mental Health Initiative's (CAMHI) Consumer Advocates put together to provide our readers with information on what telepsychiatry is and to potentially help you, or someone you know, make the decision on whether or not telepsychiatry is right for you.



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Telepsychiatry: Is It For You?

By: CAMHI Consumer Advocate

First, to know if telepsychiatry is for you or not, one should know what it is. Telepsychiatry is a practice of healthcare that combines telemedicine (using telecommunication and information technology to provide clinical health care remotely when patient and provider are not physically present with each other) to the field of psychiatric assessment and care. The doctor and patient see each other using video conferencing equipment and have their appointment that way – even when they hundreds of miles away from each other.

What are the benefits of telepsychiatry? These include the patient being able to see their psychiatrist without having to travel a long



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distance. Some can even see them from the comfort of their own homes. Also, clients have reported that telepsychiatry is as effective as in-person psychiatric appointments.

What about drawbacks? The cost of telecommunication could be a drawback due to the equipment and the need to have people trained to operate and understand it. It also decreases human interaction a psychiatrist and their patient would otherwise normally have together.

Some people from the four county area (Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright), who have participated in the telepsychiatry, were asked to share their opinions on it. Below are their responses.

"I feel it is not personable" ~ Benton County resident

“When I first started seeing my psychiatrist it was in person. Now we are using telepsychiatry. To me, I feel my care has not changed.” ~ Benton County resident

“In my opinion, my care has been the same as seeing my psychiatrist in person.” ~ Stearns County resident

“My comfort level is low. By using telepsychiatry I feel someone could be listening to my sessions.” ~ Benton County resident

“My experience with telepsychiatry was a onetime experience. I went with a friend of mine to her appointment. I was very apprehensive. My thought is, in an appointment you should have good body language and eye contact. After the appointment, I was very impressed with telepsychiatry.” ~ Sherburne County resident

So, whether you’ve decided that telepsychiatry is or isn’t for you, or if you’re still on the fence about it, one thing remains. Telepsychiatry is a growing practice and it is something we are seeing more of in our area.

Resources

Myers, Kathleen (2013). Telepsychiatry: Time to Connect. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*; 52(3): pgs 1-3.

Ventriglio, Antonio (2017). "Telepsychiatry and social psychiatry". *International journal of social psychiatry*; 63(5):p. 387