



Healthcare
Improvement
Scotland

SHTG
Advice on health
technologies

Clinician-guided internet-based psychotherapy compared with face-to-face therapy for people with anxiety or depression

Plain Language Summary | SHTG Assessment 02 | January 2021

What are anxiety and depression?

Anxiety and depression are common mental health conditions.

Anxiety symptoms include worry and fear which can cause distress and affect daily life.

People experiencing depression may have continuous sadness and feelings of hopelessness. They may lose interest in things which they previously enjoyed.

What is clinician-guided internet-based psychotherapy?

Clinician-guided internet-based psychotherapy is where a person works through a therapy programme on the internet. The programme is completed with the support of a trained therapist such as a clinical psychologist. A clinical psychologist is a professional who works with people who have a wide range of mental health issues.

The programme is designed to help a person with anxiety or depression understand and manage their symptoms.

A therapist is in contact regularly to check how things are going, provide encouragement and guide the person through the programme.

Why is this important?

This is important because providing a service in this way may mean more people with these common conditions can get help.

What we did

We looked at the evidence on whether this way of helping people with anxiety or depression is as effective as working directly with a therapist face-to-face.

We looked to see if it is safe and good value for money.

We also looked for studies on whether people like this way of getting help.

What we found

Most of the studies were on cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) which aims to change how a person thinks and behaves in relation to the problems causing their distress. This type of therapy can help a person think about daily life in a more positive way.

There was not much information comparing guided internet-based CBT with face-to-face CBT and more studies are needed.

From the studies so far it seems that internet-based psychotherapy, using CBT, works just as well as face-to-face psychotherapy and many people find it to be acceptable.

There was no information directly comparing safety.

It is difficult to say whether it is good value for money compared with face-to-face psychotherapy. This is because different studies came to different estimates.

What is our conclusion?

There is a need for large studies to check if internet-guided psychotherapy is as effective as face-to-face psychotherapy. These studies should also look at safety and value for money.

What next?

This work is going to be used by NHS Education for Scotland to help plan their psychology services.

This plain language summary has been produced based on SHTG Assessment 02
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