Reach COPD Care - A digital health solution. Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) treatment to address symptoms of anxiety and depression in patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

This innovation addresses two key priorities for the NHS: COPD and Mental Health. COPD is a common condition affecting millions of people in the United Kingdom (UK) and is a leading cause of mortality and disability. A digital CBT programme of work titled Reach COPD Care has been developed to help COPD suffers with Mental Health issues.

Traditionally, mental health teams have managed anxiety and depression. However, this may not be the best model of care for patients with complex problems such as COPD.

The Case for Change

- Breathlessness is a common distressing symptom in COPD.
- Symptoms of anxiety and depression are also common. The Newcastle COPD CBT Care Study funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) found that 59% of COPD patients screened reported symptoms of anxiety and 44% had symptoms of depression (1,2).
- Symptoms of anxiety and depression in COPD results in patients experiencing poorer overall outcomes including reduced quality of life, increased hospital admissions and early mortality.
- Healthcare professionals involved in COPD care naturally focus on the physical impact of COPD.
- The treatment for psychological co-morbidities is poor.
- Patients with COPD are often reluctant to seek help for mental health problems due to stigma.
- There are few respiratory healthcare professionals educated and trained in CBT.

Overview of Innovation

The unmet need to address psychological difficulties in COPD was identified in 1999 as part of an MSc research project. Respiratory Nurse Consultant, Karen Heslop-Marshall, trained in CBT and developed “The Lung Manual CBT Intervention” specifically for COPD patients. The treatment was developed over several years and involves 2-6 sessions of face to face CBT treatment depending on the patient’s individual need.

With funding from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), a randomised controlled trial (RCT) was completed comparing The Lung Manual Intervention and self-help leaflets. The study is the largest to date and demonstrated CBT delivered by respiratory nurses was effective for COPD patients (2). However, the current NHS workforce does not have the skills or expertise to deliver it.

As there is a national shortage of CBT therapists, the logical next step was to develop a personalised and interactive digital COPD CBT treatment, which would be able to deliver CBT at low costs, and at scale to increase availability of CBT to COPD patients.
The key objectives of Reach COPD Care were to:

- Develop a digital version of the effective face to face CBT treatment provided as part of the Newcastle COPD CBT Care Study.
- Ensure the treatment is individualised and appropriate for COPD patients.
- Ensure the treatment is as effective as the face to face CBT used in the Newcastle COPD CBT Care Study.

is the first CBT treatment for COPD patients which has a large RCT to support its use. Further information can be found at www.reachcopdcare.com

Impact

There is now strong evidence that CBT improves psychological well-being and quality of life, and reduces hospital admissions and attendances to Accident and Emergency Departments for COPD patients (1,2). The treatment offered through Reach COPD Care has been through initial stages of patient testing and has been extremely well received by patients.

Next Steps and Plans for the Future

- Increase respiratory health care professionals’ awareness of the importance of screening and treatment for psychological distress and the benefits of using CBT to help aid self-management.
- Launch the service across other parts of England. Reach COPD Care allows health services to provide a specialised CBT treatment for COPD at low costs, to large numbers of patients (at scale), without any waiting lists, and provides an alternative to face to face treatment.
- Secure further research funding to assess the impact of Reach COPD Care and identify the most effective way to introduce psychological care for COPD patients.
- Present the findings of our research at professional conferences and in academic peer review journals.

Actions Taken

1. Patients and carers were asked if CBT delivered via a web-based platform would be acceptable to them.

2. A digital version of Dr Karen Heslop-Marshall’s highly effective CBT based treatment for co-morbid anxiety and depression in COPD was developed. Reach is a six week digital CBT treatment based on the Newcastle COPD CBT Study Lung Manual Intervention (1, 2).

3. A phase of patient testing and feedback followed and the programme has been refined and improved.

Progress to Date

In partnership with AHSN NENC and Born Digital, Rubrum, a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) secured funding to develop Reach COPD Care. Reach has been commissioned by a number of Clinical Commissioning Groups to address COPD patients distressing symptoms of anxiety and depression. This

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improving healthcare and driving economic growth through innovation

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References
