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TIP #112

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Using Mobile Phones to Monitor Teenagers Mental Health

A program that uses mobile phones to track the mental health of young people suffering depression will be evaluated through funding from the Telstra Foundation to see if it is suitable to treat youth depression nationwide.

Following the successful world-first pilot of mobiletype developed by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), the Telstra Foundation has committed a Social Innovation Grant worth \$285,000 over two years as part of its ongoing community investment commitment.

The mobiletype pilot assisted doctors to help treat 14 to 24-year-olds with mental health concerns through the use of mobile phones. The program monitored each young person's mood, stress levels, coping strategies, alcohol and cannabis use, exercise, eating patterns and general lifestyle factors.

Participants answered the mobiletype program questions on a programmed mobile asking them about how they were feeling. The responses were sent to a website interface which evaluated and assessed each patient's mental well-being and produced an individual report for the doctor to help them determine what treatment was required.

The Telstra Foundation funding will enable the Murdoch Institute's Centre for Adolescent Health to conduct a Victoria-wide randomised control trial of mobiletype involving 200 participants. It is hoped that the trial will result in empirical data that supports the medical benefits of mobiletype and will lead to a national roll-out of the program.

Doctors involved in the pilot program said that the feedback report assisted them to gain a better insight into the mental well-being of more than 90 per cent of their patients and that 81 per cent of their patients had a better understanding of their own mental well-being after receiving their doctor's feedback.

Telstra Foundation Chairman, Herb Elliott AC, MBE, said mobile technology had a crucial role to play in facilitating the work of the institute, led by Research Fellow Dr Sophie Reid .

"The work that Dr Sophie Reid and her team are doing at MCRI pushes the boundaries in mental health treatment. mobiletype will use technology to help unravel some of the confusion around youth depression and help doctors get the information they need to treat their patients in the best way possible," he said.

Dr Reid said that one challenge in detecting youth depression is the difficulty some young patients have in communicating their mental health issues to their GPs.

"mobiletype capitalises on the familiarity young people have communicating via SMS to help them express their feelings and have their mental well-being effectively assessed," said Dr Reid.

"The Telstra Foundation has been behind this project from its inception and we're very happy to see an ongoing commitment to developing innovative ways to treat youth depression using communications technologies. Telstra

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