

Psychological treatment for Sask. residents is now only a click away

BY ALEC SALLOUM, LEADER-POST OCTOBER 8, 2015

It's easier than ever for those suffering from depression and anxiety to get the help they need. All you need is an Internet connection.

Ten years ago in Australia, Dr. Nickolai Titov began administering and researching the effects of psychological treatments online and over the telephone. Part of what motivated Titov was how few sought help.

"About one in five of the adult Australian population, every year, have significant problems with symptoms of anxiety and dep and we know that a small proportion of those people get treatments," said Titov.

At Macquarie University in Sydney, Titov started researching developing treatment plans that are now used in Saskatchewan.

"There are numerous barriers to accessing treatment," said Titov. He added that these barriers include the stigmas associated with mental health, convenience, ease of access, and the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

In Australia, Titov is now the director of MindSpot Clinic, a nation wide online and telephone treatment service. The Clinic serves 50 new patients every day and over 20,000 each year.

"For many people we're working with, they otherwise wouldn't be able to access care," said Titov.

Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos, director of the University of Regina's Online Therapy Unit (ROTU), attests to this accessibility. "We've had patients in every health region in Saskatchewan, every region of the province ... some of the northern health regions don't have therapists, this is a way for clients in those regions that don't have therapists to get this type of care," said Hadjistavropoulos. The clinic provides service over the phone, through the mail, when the Internet is not reliable or available in remote areas. The techniques are based on thousands of trials and studies explained Titov, adding that their approach is to give "real world" coping skills.

"We have this huge undertreatment of a problem - people are suffering. There's a huge cost to not treating these problems," said Hadjistavropoulos.

Part of the benefit to these programs is that they're cheap, explained both doctors. Canada and Australia are not worlds away when you consider the underprivileged with no access to mental health care.

In Nunavut, where suicide rates are 10 times the national average, programs like the one developed by Titov could save lives.

"Essentially, the clinical outcomes we've observed are as good as face-to-face treatment ... you can treat people online, around the world," beamed Titov.

Titov is in Regina to consult with members of ROTU, and to speak on his research. This lecture will be today at 4:15 p.m. in the Education Auditorium at the U of R. asalloum@leaderpost.com @alecjsalloum

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