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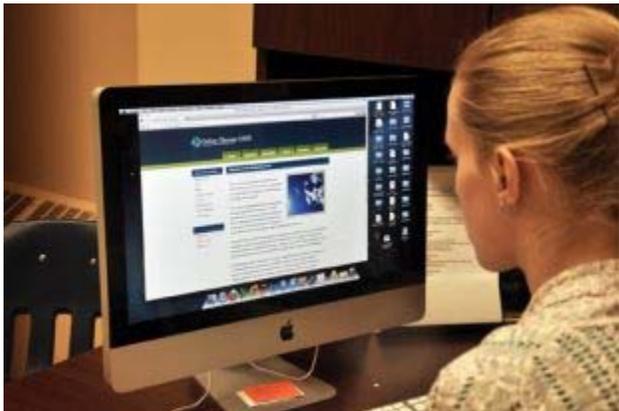
Learning online to cope with anxiety



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Published on November 04, 2014

It turns out Internet-based cognitive therapy is just as effective as face-to-face therapy.



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The Five Hills Health Region, in partnership with the University of Regina, is offering an Internet-based cognitive therapy program for individuals with mild to moderate anxiety and depression. The Wellbeing Course is an eight-week course with five modules.

Clients who took the therapy reported that outcome, said Cara McDavid, a senior social worker with the Mental Health and Addiction Services with the Five Hills Health Region (FHHR). The therapy is for people with mild to moderate anxiety and depression.

“You can get just as effective treatment in the comfort and privacy of your own home as you can coming to see a therapist here in the clinic and it’s the same material as well,” she said.

“There’s probably lots of scenarios that would make it more difficult for someone to come in for face-to-face.

“If you can access the same treatment, the same therapy any time in the day that you want to that works for you and fit it into your own schedule versus trying to change your schedule to access service, that’s what I think makes it

really effective and powerful for people.”

In a partnership with the University of Regina, the FHHR is able to provide the online therapy for service, education and research, done on a secure website. There is currently an eight-week Wellbeing Course available with five modules.

“It covers basic skills to improve your wellness and functioning when you’re experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression,” said McDavid. “It kind of covers things like managing

your physical symptoms, adjusting your thinking, maybe changing some behavioral habits and things like that just to make you feel better, help you feel like you're coping better."

Two of those modules – managing thoughts and relax prevention – will take place over two weeks.

"The people who sign up for the course who are in this region are assigned to one of our e-therapists or our therapists who work here in the health region who provide that support or people can be connected to a graduate student at the university as well," said McDavid.

"While they're doing the course, they get a weekly contact with us either through the messaging system on the website or via the phone to check in to chat about the work, to answer any questions that they have."

Clients can have as much contact with the therapist as they like. She added one in five Canadians experience anxiety and depression.

"It's very common and prevalent," said McDavid. "It's nice to have options to offer people based on their comfort level to meet their needs."

She said there haven't been as many referrals for the program as they expected to see, but that's likely because many people don't know about it.

"I think once people know that they can access something like this, it will get a lot more uptake," said McDavid.

To be eligible for the program, all clients must be at least 18 years old, live in Saskatchewan, have access to the Internet and suffer from mild to moderate symptoms of anxiety and depression. Contact information for a health care provider, such as a family doctor, must be provided just in case the symptoms get worse or follow-up is needed.

There are also some exclusion criteria.

"If someone's symptoms are more severe, they're generally excluded from the program," said McDavid. "If they have an active addiction or if they're experiencing symptoms of psychosis or if there's a high risk of suicide, they would not be appropriate for the program. They would be more appropriate for more intensive service."

For more information on the program, and to see a screening questionnaire and frequently asked questions to see if the program is a fit, visit www.onlinetherapyuser.ca.

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