Australian Psychological Society - eTherapy

The APS recently completed a brief review of a range of internet-based services and products. This review was developed in order to address a gap in knowledge and provide psychologists with examples and a critique of some of the mental and physical health-related websites that exist. Wherever possible it provides summary information of the services and products (including URL), as well as commenting on the strengths and limitations of the site. Due to the scope and nature of the internet, the review cannot be exhaustive but does aim to give the reader an idea of what is potentially available and what some of the risks might be.

Target Groups	Topics	Type of Best Practice	Country
• Adults • Children / Adolescents	• Depression • Anxiety • Insomnia • Suicide	• Counselling • Coaching • Platform	• Australia

Description

Internet supported interventions

Internet supported interventions is a broad term that refers to the provision of psychological support, therapy, education/information and assistance in many different forms and modes. In essence, it also refers to the interface, at one level of another, between the psychologist and the consumer. While the consumer or client might, for example, only experience or access the direct information provided by a website, or interact with a psychologist through online counselling, the psychologist should continue to follow guidelines for ethical and best practice for the particular service they provide.

This section provides information and references to current guidelines for the provision of internet supported interventions; forms of internet supported interventions; a review of internet supported interventions; and hyperlinks to a selection of websites providing forms of therapeutic intervention.

Standards and guidelines for appropriate online therapy

While the provision, consumption and application of psychological information, knowledge and services - ranging from physical and mental health, to organisational, sports, and neuropsychological - has been rapidly expanding in use and reach since the 1990s, practice guidelines are a relatively new development. Since 2000, the APS has made available to its members ethical guidelines for providing internet based psychological services and products. Other guidelines for providing internet based support services have been developed by the Australian Federal Government Department of Health and Ageing and the International Society for Mental Health Online. Adhering to ethical guidelines not only helps ensure that a safer and better quality of service is provided to consumers, but that exposure to risk is minimised for psychologists.

Responsibilities and principles related to informed consent, secure communication and data/file storage, and crisis management are no less important when the services are provided via the internet. Consider, for example, what you would be obligated to do if you're providing a

synchronised online counselling session, and your client reveals a very high risk of suicide. What and how could you ensure their wellbeing?

Cutting corners is not an option.

Forms of online therapy

The proliferation, simplification and diminished costs (if not free) of software programs that enable/host/facilitate internet-based services has produced an increasing array of opportunities for psychologists to provide services and information to consumers. Psychologists considering providing services via the internet might consider such questions/issues as: how much direct or indirect support they want to have with clients; whether they communicate with consumers in synchronised (‘real time') or asynchronised (delayed) time; use programs such as Skype to communicate with clients; and even whether or not services will be provided in a virtual world. Naturally, there is the scope for services to incorporate more than one mode of communication into any form of service delivery.

A recent article by Barak, Klein and Proudfoot (2009) proposes a set of definitions for the range and types of services that psychologists can/could provide via the internet. While one of the purposes of the article is to provide some clarity and standardisation of terminology in this field, it also provides a more detailed description of the range of choices and technologies available to psychologists.



Original language

English

Country

Australia

Link

https://www.psychology.org.au/essentials/etherapy/

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https://www.ecounselling4youth.eu/project/