PROJECT INFORMATION

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Comparing a Smartphone Program with a Peer-Led Program to Help People with Serious Mental Illness Manage Their Symptoms

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What was the research about?

People with a serious mental illness, or SMI, may have difficulty with daily activities like working or taking care of themselves. Programs at mental health clinics can help people with SMI manage their symptoms and improve their health. But it can be hard for people with SMI to get to the clinic to use these programs, and some may not feel comfortable at a clinic.

In this study, the research team compared two programs to help people with SMI manage their symptoms. In the FOCUS program, people used a smartphone app. In the Wellness Recovery Action Plan, or WRAP, program, people went to group sessions at a clinic.

What were the results?

Using the programs. The research team studied how often people used the programs. To do this, the team looked at whether people used FOCUS at least once a day for five days every week. For WRAP, the team looked at whether people went to at least 60 minutes of a 90-minute session every week. More people in FOCUS started the program than people in WRAP. After eight weeks, more people in FOCUS used their assigned program than those in WRAP. When the programs ended after 12 weeks, the team found no difference between people's use of the two programs.

Program satisfaction. The study found no difference in how satisfied people were with their assigned program. People in both programs reported high satisfaction.

Recovery and quality of life. The study found no difference in how well the programs helped people recover or in people's quality of life.

Depression and other symptoms. After the study, people in both programs had less depression, anxiety, and other symptoms than before the study. The study found no difference between the two groups.

Who was in the study?

The study included 163 people with SMI getting care at a large health agency in the Chicago area. Of these, 65 percent were African American. The average patient age was 49, and 59 percent were men. The patients had schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, or major depressive disorder.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned people to either FOCUS or WRAP by chance. Each program lasted 12 weeks.

- People in FOCUS used a smartphone app. They got daily prompts to remind them to answer questions about their symptoms and functioning. They could also access information to help them manage their symptoms. A support specialist called people

weekly to talk about their symptoms and any problems using the smartphone.

- People in WRAP went to a mental health clinic every week for a two-hour group session. People with lived experience with mental illness led the sessions. In the group sessions, people talked about challenges. They also put together plans to help them get well.

To compare the effects of FOCUS and WRAP, the research team gave surveys to people at the end of the programs and again three months later. The team also interviewed people in both programs.

What were the limits of the study?
The research team gave people in the FOCUS program a smartphone with a data plan. People who don't have smart phones with data plans wouldn't be able to use this program. The study took place in one urban area; results may not apply to other areas.

Because the team didn't compare the FOCUS and WRAP groups with a group that didn't get help with their symptoms, the team doesn't know if the changes were because of FOCUS and WRAP or something else.

Future research could see if the FOCUS program works for people in rural or other areas where access to clinic services is difficult.

How can people use the results?
Compared with the WRAP program, more people in the FOCUS group were willing to start the program and more people engaged with it during the first eight weeks of treatment. Mental health clinics can use the study results when looking at how to engage and support people with SMI.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/BenZeev150.