

Internet interventions beat depression

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new study from The Australian National University shows that online therapy programs can play a major and long-lasting role in treating depression.

Dr Lou Farrer, from the ANU Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR), trialled the effectiveness of online programs MoodGYM and BluePages when used in conjunction with telephone counselling services provided by Lifeline.

Dr Farrer said there was an immediate drop in [symptoms of depression](#) among callers to Lifeline who used the two programs.

“We worked with Lifeline centres in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. Lifeline counsellors in these centres identified callers who seemed to be experiencing symptoms of [depression](#) or anxiety,” said Dr Farrer.

“We then split these callers up into groups. Some were asked to complete MoodGYM and BluePages on their own; others were given these programs as well as weekly phone calls to see how they were progressing. Another group received weekly phone calls without using the online programs and the final group received the usual Lifeline service.

“What we found was that the groups who had used MoodGYM and BluePages had a significant, immediate drop in symptoms of depression. Surprisingly the difference between the groups who completed the

programs with and without the weekly phone calls was minor. This was surprising as we expected that the programs might be more effective for those who received the weekly [phone calls](#),” she said.

Dr Farrer also said that the online therapy programs had a long-lasting impact on depression symptoms.

“What is really exciting is that we found that for people who used the online programs their depressive [symptoms](#) stayed reduced for at least six months after the intervention was finished. So, the online programs not only had short term effects, but the effects lasted.

“The study further supports the usefulness of these programs. Online treatment programs are not only inexpensive and readily accessible; they are also effective. Hopefully, they will continue to have a bigger role in the future.

“Lifeline already refers people to MoodGYM, but whether it becomes a more formalised part of their service may be something to look toward in the future. I am hopeful that the positive results of the study will translate to more people with depression and anxiety accessing interventions in the future,” she said.

Provided by Australian National University

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