

Web technology offers mental health support

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A web based application connecting people with potential mental health issues to clinical advice and support networks has been created by researchers at Aston and Warwick universities.

[myGRiST](#) is an online assessment tool that helps people take steps towards visiting their doctor or seeking access to local [support networks](#) if they have any mental health concerns.

The aim is to identify people with 'hidden' issues, who may find it difficult to otherwise communicate their problems to family and friends. This could include assessing and managing risks such as suicide, self-harm, and harm to others.

Developed by Dr Christopher Buckingham (Aston University) and Dr Ann Adams (Warwick Medical School) in conjunction with NHS and other mental-health practitioners, the on-line psychological tool provides a clinical assessment to any prospective patient. It allows people to enter data about their mental health and living circumstances and gain accurate feedback regarding where risks may be occurring in their lives and how to receive appropriate help.

The online assessment advice built into the decision support tool has been developed from a database of half a million assessments and accurate risk judgments provided by more than 3,000 mental health practitioners over the last five years. The system has been piloted with current mental health patients and now the team want to provide the general public with similar on-line access early next year.

Dr Christopher Buckingham, a senior lecturer in computer science at Aston University, said: "We live in a crowded world but in our minds we can often feel lonely and forgotten. The idea behind the GRiST decision support system is to link people with possible or identified mental-health concerns to a care network via their own self-assessments. They can determine who is able to see the assessments and there will be actions built into those assessments that will activate emails, text messages, alerts, and other support mechanisms depending on the risk levels and their causes.

"The advice is grounded on the consensus of several thousand trained mental-health practitioners. It will be a revolutionary new way of empowering people to monitor their own risks in conjunction with a supportive network of practitioners, carers, friends, and families. We want to provide a canopy of care for people who may otherwise feel isolated and abandoned."

The idea of an on-line public accessed system builds upon the team's previous development of GRiST (Galatean Risk and Safety Tool) for the Department of Health. This original database was developed to provide practitioners from all disciplines with a principled approach to assessing and managing risks associated with mental-health problems.

The GRiST application is being used by NHS clinicians in secondary care [mental-health](#) trusts such as Cumbria, Humber and Birmingham Children's Hospital, by third-sector organisations working in the community such as Certitude, Mental Health Matters, Imagine, and Mental Health Concern, and by private organisations such as Raphael Healthcare and Barchester Hospitals.

Provided by Aston University

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