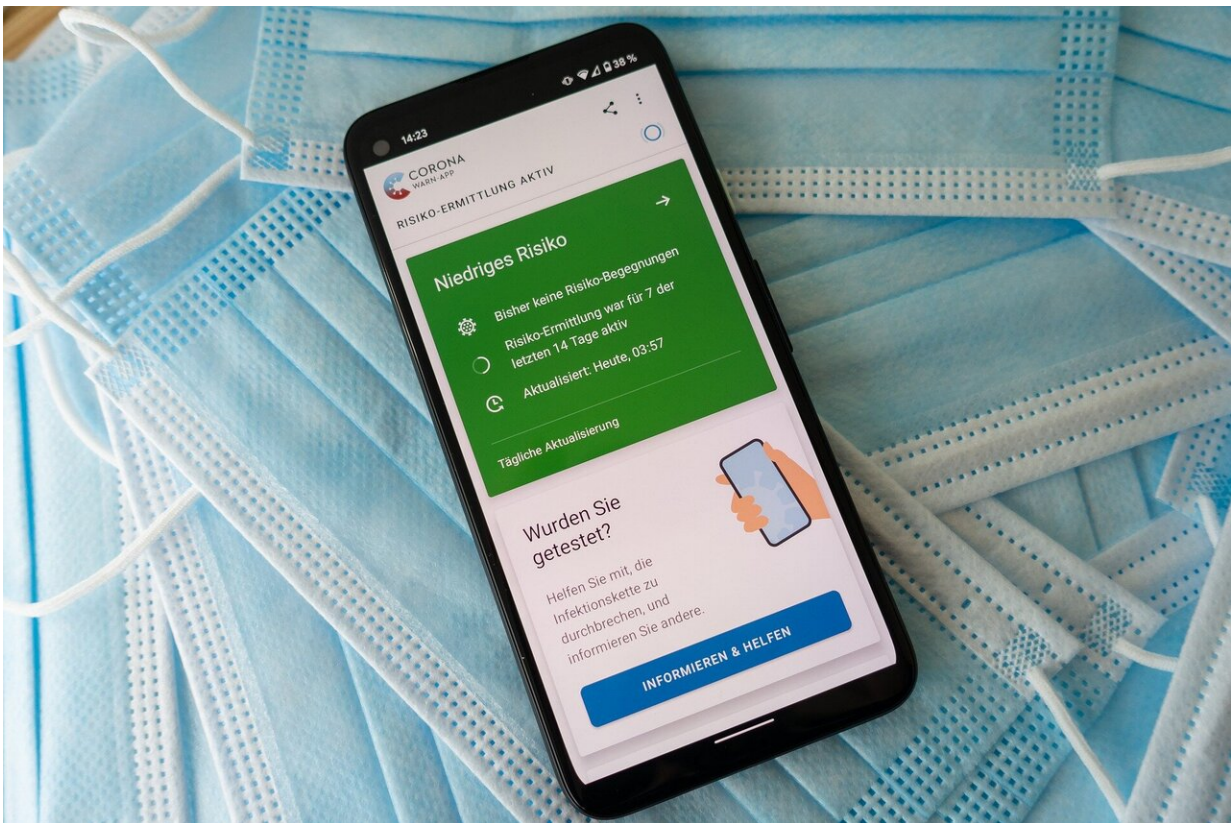


Digital healthcare challenging to people with severe mental health illnesses

April 27 2021, by Samantha Martin



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Research from the University of York has shown that a more digitized healthcare service could pose significant challenges to those with severe mental ill health.

The findings, which have been used in the House of Lords recent report on "Planning for a Hybrid World," are part of the Optimizing Wellbeing in Self-isolation (OWLS) study at York, which explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people with the most severe forms of mental illness, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

In a survey of more than 360 people with severe mental ill [health](#), requesting details on their use of digital technology, the researchers found that more than a third of people did not use the internet for daily activities, and that some expressed that digital experiences can make their symptoms worse.

The OWLS study participants are members of the Closing the Gap Network's cohort of 10,000 people with severe mental ill health.

Anxiety

Dr. Emily Peckham, Research Fellow in Mental Health from the University of York's Department of Health Sciences, said: "Based on what we have learnt so far, [digital technologies](#) can be a source of great anxiety for those with severe mental ill health. It can increase paranoia for example about security and being safe whilst online.

"This can result in people, who are some of the most vulnerable in society, not accessing [health services](#) that are delivered remotely.

"Having experienced the positives and negatives of a more digitalised health [service](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that some elements of these services are likely to form part of our future, but we must not forget that adaptations and considerations must be made for those people who find this very difficult to engage with on health grounds."

Accelerated trends

The House of Lords report cites that the pandemic has increased dependence on digital technologies and accelerated digital trends such as [online shopping](#) and remote working, but acknowledges whilst some may adapt to these changes effortlessly, there will be millions of people that will not.

In the healthcare system, the pandemic has meant online GP appointments, digital forms of submitting medical symptoms, and mobile apps, which have made positive, as well as some negative, contributions to the working lives of GPs.

The OWLs study in relation to digital engagement, digital experience, digital access, digital knowledge and digital healthcare services, has helped shaped the recommendations to the UK Government for a new hybrid way of working, which will include policies to ensure that nobody, particularly those most vulnerable, will not be left behind in a new digital age.

Equal access

Professor Simon Gilbody, Director of the Closing the Gap Network at the University of York, said: "Contributions to this important report means that people who have severe mental ill health are being considered, and we are encouraged that inquiries, such as the House of Lords report, takes us a step closer to a more equal and supported access to healthcare."

To read more of the House of Lords recommendations click [here](#) or visit the Government committees [website](#).

Provided by University of York

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