

Enhancing the patient experience and enabling more accurate mental health assessments using tablets: A Benefits Realization case study

Background

Mental health-related stigma can be a major barrier for individuals trying to reach out for help and discuss their mental health concerns with a healthcare provider.^{1,2} Giving patients tablets to complete questionnaires while they wait to see their primary care provider (PCP) has shown promising results for gathering crucial patient information regarding mental health concerns and bridging the communication gap between patient and PCP.³

In partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo Wellington, the eHealth Centre of Excellence has provided tablets to 13 clinics to support mental health assessments using standardized questionnaires (such as PHQ-9 and GAD-7) while patients wait in the waiting room, allowing them adequate time to answer the questions attentively and without feeling judged.

Mental health assessments completed by patients on tablets while waiting to see their PCP facilitate more honest responses from patients who may not be comfortable discussing details about their mental health in a face-to-face interaction. For the PCP, the assessments support a more comprehensive picture of the patient's mental health condition, treatment goals, and potential risk for suicide, thereby reducing the probability of a patient's condition being misdiagnosed and the patient falling through the cracks, as well as ensuring that a safety plan for the patient is created where appropriate.

Incorporating tablets as part of the patient's journey focuses on putting the patient's needs first:



“The tablet provided a comfortable medium in which I could honestly communicate my feelings regarding my mental health. I like that it gave me time to think over my responses and really analyze my feelings. If I had been talking one on one with the doctor, I may have not wanted to pause as long to think about my answer. The questions also made me realize areas of my life affected by my mental health that I would have never connected on my own. I think this piece of technology is a great way for people to share their thoughts in a very comfortable, low pressure way.”

Erin B., Patient

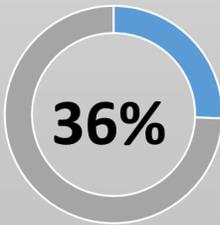
“In the past and before the tablets were implemented into our workflow, patients may have downplayed their mental health condition. With the technology integrated into our practice, the tablet allows the patient to focus on how they are feeling and provide more details than he/she would otherwise provide, ensuring that we have a productive appointment that meets their needs.”

Dr. Patel-Christopher, MD, and Cathy Davis, RN, Dr. Abha Patel-Christopher's Office

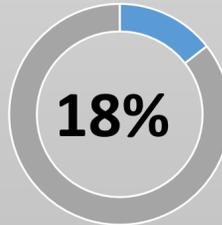
What were the benefits?

Ninety-two per cent of patients responded positively (n=1,907), indicating that the tablets were easy to use. In addition, tablets enhanced the patients' ability to communicate, helping them to feel more comfortable answering difficult questions, and allowing clinicians to reach a greater proportion of individuals.

Of the patients completing the patient experience survey:



indicated that using the tablet helped them provide more honest answers



would not have liked to answer the mental health assessment questions during a face to face chat with their health care provider

Source: QBIC Patient Experience Survey (n=1,727)

Tablets **empower patients** to discuss mental health and enhance their ability to **communicate sensitive details**.

When patients answer the questions honestly, the PCP is able to **assess suicide risk more effectively** and ensure that patients at risk receive appropriate treatment or referral to the hospital on an urgent basis.

Tablets create a new option for **patient-PCP communication**, allowing patients to **provide a more comprehensive assessment** so that the PCP has more information at the point-of-care to evaluate treatment options with the patient.

Tablet use **saves time by providing relevant information at the point-of-care**, allowing for a more productive patient-PCP interaction to discuss and evaluate treatment options rather than having the PCP take a history or wait for a patient to complete a paper-based form during the encounter.

The patient and their PCP can **follow the patient's treatment progress** more objectively since the mental health assessment scores can be graphed when the patient completes the standardized questionnaires on the tablet.

Program description



QBIC (Quality Based Improvements in Care) is a program hosted by the eHealth Centre of Excellence (eCE) in the Idea Quarter of Waterloo, Ontario. The objective of QBIC is to improve the health and wellness of Waterloo Wellington residents by supporting primary care clinicians to realize greater value out of existing ehealth technologies.

The program's highly qualified team of Change Management Specialists offer free ehealth coaching sessions and workshops to clinicians across the region, either one on one, or in a group. They also work with system partners — such as the Ontario Renal Network, Cardiac Care Network, and Centre for Effective Practice — to develop EMR decision support tools integrating best practices.

For more information on QBIC's range of services, please contact QBIC Program Manager Danika Walden, at Danika.Walden@ehealthCE.ca. A full catalogue can be found at: www.ehealthce.ca/QBIC.

Works cited

1. Brien S. et al. (2015). Taking Stock: A Report on the Quality of Mental Health and Addictions Services in Ontario. An HQO/ICES Report. Toronto.
2. Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council. (2016). Better Mental Health Means Better Health. Annual Report. ON: Toronto.
3. Ferrari, M., Ahmad, F., Shakya, Y., Ledwos, C., & McKenzie, K. (2016). Computer-assisted client assessment survey for mental health: patient and health provider perspectives. BMC Health Services Research, 16, 516. <http://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1756-0>

If you have any questions or would like further information on this Benefits Realization (BR) case, please contact Jennifer La, BR Specialist at the eCE, at: Jennifer.La@ehealthCE.ca

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