2.4 USING TECHNOLOGY

FIONA ROBARDS

For many young people, the place they feel most comfortable and at ease is online. They form valuable relationships, express themselves freely and are comfortable finding out information and communicating using social media and other platforms.

Services supporting young people to be healthier and happier can use technology to engage with young people and to provide health information, advice and support, and even to provide clinical services.

Technology changes rapidly. Platforms, sites and applications (commonly referred to as 'apps'), that are popular today can be obsolete tomorrow. Rather than focus on specific technological options, this chapter focuses on helping you identify the sorts of services and interventions that health services can deliver using technology.

This chapter provides a broad overview of the ways that a service provider may engage young people using technology in a clinical context including health promotion and providing clinical services.

Young people tell us that it is important for professionals to engage them in the spaces where they are…and, overwhelmingly, young people are online. There are many reasons to think about delivering health information, support and even services to young people online:

- It is a cost effective way of reaching large numbers of young people

- Information is available 24 hours a day

- The web can be accessed anonymously and can be a non-threatening source of information for young people when embarrassing or sensitive issues are worrying them

- Information and advice can reach young people in areas where face-to-face services may not be available

There is a growing body of evidence supporting this way of working and an increasing number of good practice examples. However, many organisations continue to restrict access to the internet and other forms of technology because of a lack of infrastructure, concern about internet costs and a limited understanding of the benefits technology offers to young clients. This means the organisation is limited in the ways it can:

- Promote events and resources

- Promote services to young people

- Build community awareness about the organisation and its services

- Communicate and engage directly with young people.

NSW Government policies, such as the *NSW Youth Health Policy 2011-2016: Healthy bodies, healthy minds, vibrant futures*, emphasise the importance of technology in young peoples lives, and the need for service providers to find new ways to make services meaningful and attractive to young people. Being connected online means that organisations can connect widely and rapidly to promote their services. Organisations that are visible online gain increased credibility.

FINDING OUT MORE…

For more information about using technology for improved health outcomes for young people, see:

Campbell AJ & Robards F. (2012). *Using technologies safely and effectively to promote young people's wellbeing: a better practice guide for services.* NSW Centre for the Advancement of Adolescent Health: Westmead, NSW and the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre: Abbotsford, Vic.

It is available from the Young and Well website www.youngandwellcrc.org.au

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USING TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Despite some of the risks the internet brings, technology can also support young people's social and emotional development. Social media allow young people to maintain connections with friends and family and find out about their local community and the broader world. The internet is also a space where young people can experiment with their self-identity and how they express their identity to the world. There is also the potential to be exploring identities online when it may not feel safe to do so face to face – this can be important for young people experimenting or exploring their sexual identity.

There are many online databases of youth and health services available in communities across Australia. Some are very comprehensive and require teams of staff to maintain their accuracy and relevance. Search for your service's details online and ensure that information about your service is up-to-date so that young people seeking help and other service providers can find you.

Most services have a website. Websites can provide basic information about your service and how to access it, but websites are also a useful and non-threatening way to provide health information

to young people. Consider linking to fact sheets and including a 'frequently asked questions' section (this could include what to bring, the cost of the service etc.). Some websites give young people the opportunity to send in questions which are then answered by health professionals on the site.

Remember that information found on the internet can be a young person's main source of health knowledge. For this reason, ensure that any fact sheets, information or advice you provide online is evidence based and designed to encourage young people to seek support if they need it.

To make your website more dynamic, consider using videos and interactive content. You could think about creating a video from a visitor's perspective from the moment they walk through the front door. Workers could introduce themselves, saying a little about what they do. These ideas can help your service build a more youth-friendly online presence and begin to build an ongoing relationship with website visitors.

Social networking can also be a useful tool for service promotion. Social networking is most successful when it invites two-way communications rather than being used as a "bulletin board". Consider how you could facilitate discussion with young people using social media sites and services.

FAST FACTS

- 77% of young people with a mental health problem do not access the care they need (National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007)

- 91% of 12-17 year olds indicated that the internet was a 'highly important' part of their life (ACMA 2008)

- Over 95% of young Australians use the internet (Ewing et al. 2008)

- The majority of young people spend between 1 - 3 hours per day on the internet (Burns et al. 2010)

- Online chatting was ranked at the most favoured leisure activity by young people (ACMA 2008)

- Mission Australia (2011) found more than 1 in 5 Australian young people aged 11-24 ranked the internet highly as a source of advice and support for concerns about sexuality, discrimination, body image, depression, and self harm.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

When you are thinking about a new website or a social media presence for your service, there are five points to address before you even begin thinking about content, design or platform.

Ask yourself:

- What do you want to achieve?

- What kind of technology will best help you in what you want to achieve?

- How will you achieve your goals?

- What will be your key messages?

- How will you know you are successful?

Your answers to these questions will help you decide the best forum for your service (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, a website, somewhere else?) And what you should be doing online.

You can then:

- Involve young people in designing your website or presence so it appeals to a diverse group

- Direct young people to websites that have quality information

- Make sure the information you post is current, relevant and accurate – and keep it that way.

- Think about the best options for your service. You can create a Facebook page, for example, that does not allow comments to be posted. This is less engaging for young people, but a good option if you have limited resources to actively moderate the comments.

- Plan for privacy and confidentiality. For example, create a Facebook page that people can "like" rather than a profile page where "friends" are identified.

- Include useful information so that young people know about confidentiality, consent, the services and support you can and can't provide, and how to access help in an emergency.

- Keep the page or site updated regularly. If your service is closed for a period (for example, public holidays), post an update reminding young people about the closure and offering alternative points of contact for help in a crisis.

It is very important to maintain professional boundaries while using social media. The informality of online communication and relationships can make distinctions blurry for some people. Manage the privacy settings on your personal accounts and do not accept friend requests from clients. In the case of Twitter, it is not possible to control followers (except by blocking) and content is public. Content should be professional and clinicians should not in engage in identifiable discussions online.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT CLINICAL SERVICES

For some young people, even making contact with a health or youth service can be daunting. Many young people are ambivalent consumers of health care and want to check out a service and get to know them before 'signing up' for services.

Multiple points of contact will give them options for how they access your service, but when a young person takes that first crucial step to seek help, the way they do it must be comfortable for them. Methods of contact can include:

- Calling a mobile or landline number
- Sending an email to a service's email address
- Sending a text to a mobile number
- Completing an online contact form

If you are working with young people, give them options for how they can interact with your service.

Text messages can be helpful for appointment reminders. As always, find out whether this is the sort of service the individual would find useful and, if possible, give them the option to confirm the appointment or change it by text too. You should get their permission to send appointment reminders by text and let them know when they'll receive the reminder.

Also discuss what will happen if the young person sends a message that indicates they are at risk. Ensure your service has a protocol in place for responding to such an event.

Consider sending a text or email in between sessions as a form of encouragement, and as a way of maintaining contact and building rapport with the client.

PROVIDING THERAPY ONLINE

The use of technology to deliver counselling and mental health interventions online is growing. Many service providers use a chat service or email to work with their clients and it can be particularly appealing to young people.

Being online affords them a level of privacy or anonymity that they cannot achieve if they are face-to-face with a counsellor. However, there are limitations to this privacy that must exist. As in any therapeutic encounter, confidentiality cannot be kept when a young person is at risk of causing significant harm to either themselves or others. In these instances, safety is more important than confidentiality. Ensure that your service has a clear protocol about how to handle such situations.

If you intend to offer therapy online, you will need to find a way to record interactions with your clients,

whether you store the files electronically or in a paper-based system. Ensure that electronic files are secure, just as you would with paper-based records of counselling. Access to records can be ordered by a court. Make sure that young clients understand that your files include details of all interactions, face-to-face and online.

In an online group therapy setting, young people may not realise that what they say over time may lead to them being identifiable. Group rules around confidentiality and privacy need to be discussed and made clear as it is in offline group therapy settings.

When contacting a client via email, phone, or messaging system, be mindful that there is a potential that other people may see the communication. Limit the details of the message so that you maintain the young person's confidentiality. Discuss this aspect of confidentiality with young people and encourage them to actively protect their own confidentiality by logging out, not sharing passwords and keeping their mobile devices with them.

Consent for treatment can be gained online or via the phone, and does not need to be obtained face-to-face. Be aware that this means you cannot verify the identity of the person.

As in any health service, a practitioner needs to be aware of when to refer on if a more intensive service is required. They should also negotiate a crisis management plan with a young person, should this be needed. Information about crisis services should be included on out of office replies, email signatures, and service websites.

PRACTICE POINTS FOR ONLINE THERAPY

Establish clear expectations about communication and availability: provide a time-frame for responding to emails or text messages; let young people know your days and hours of work; and provide crisis contacts in case you cannot be contacted.

When counselling online, you won't have access to the range of non-verbal cues you would in a face-to-face session. Be very aware of the tone of your messages and the language you use: keep it clear and jargon-free.

Check regularly that what you are hearing is what the young person is saying and that they are hearing your messages clearly too. Use emoticons to indicate tone and facial expression.

Remember that emails are a legal record of conversations.

USING ONLINE TOOLS AND PROGRAMS

There is a wide range of tools and programs available on the web that services can consider using with young people. Online treatment programs can be useful as a stand-alone treatment option; as a "stop-gap" measure while a young person waits to see a therapist; or as an adjunct to therapy. A young person who finds it difficult to talk about his or her experiences, feelings and concerns might prefer an online therapeutic tool.

E-couch is a self-help interactive program with modules for depression, generalised anxiety and worry, social anxiety, relationship breakdown, and loss and grief. It provides evidence-based information and teaches strategies drawn from cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal therapies as well as relaxation and physical activity. Visit ecouch.anu.edu.au

Mood Gym is an interactive web program that teaches the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy and is designed to prevent depression. It consists of five modules, an interactive game, anxiety and depression assessments, downloadable relaxation audio, a workbook and feedback assessment. Visit moodgym.anu.edu.au

Become familiar with the range of online tools available for your clients and offer ideas about how the tool might be used. For example, if you think it might be useful for a young person to monitor and track their moods, talk with them about whether they might prefer to use an online tracking program (like those available at www.medhelp.org) or an app on their phone or tablet (like Moody Me).

You can demonstrate how a program works by using a test login. Ask clients how they are going with the online treatment program and provide encouragement. Also ask for feedback about the online tool so you can better recommend it to other young people: for example, "Young people who have tried this program have told me that it was particularly useful for…"

Other useful Australian programs and sites include:

- Headspace online counselling service provides online and telephone support and counselling to young people aged 12 to 25. It is a confidential, free, anonymous, secure space where young people can chat or email qualified youth mental health professionals. Visit www. eheadspace.org.au

- Kids Helpline provides free, private and confidential, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25. Visit www.kidshelp.com.au

- Virtual clinic (which provides online treatment programs for anxiety and depression). Visit www.virtualclinic.org.au

- Mood swings (an online self-help tool for people with bipolar disorder). Visit www.moodswings. net.au

- On Track (free access to online programs, information, quizzes and advice to promote mental and physical health and wellbeing).Visit www. ontrack.org.au

FINDING OUT MORE...

Beacon is an online Hub for health and wellbeing websites. A panel of health experts provide guidance about websites for mental and physical health. www.beacon.anu.edu.au

Reachout Pro provides access and advice for health care professionals on a range of technologies and online resources that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of psychosocial support and mental health care provided to young people. www.reachoutpro.com.au
The Young and Well CRC explores the role of technology in young people's lives, and how technology can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. www.yawcrc.org.au

CHAPTER SUMMARY – WHAT TO REMEMBER

Most young people are extremely comfortable using a variety of technologies and platforms to communicate, build relationships, transact and find information. Using technology effectively gives services an opportunity to engage with young people in a space and mode that is familiar and feels safe for young people.

There are a number of factors to consider when using technology for health promotion, to promote services, or to provide clinical services directly to young people, but these issues do not outweigh the benefits of using technology effectively when working with young people.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do you use technology?

How do the young people you work with use technology?

How well do you use of technology to engage young people?

What areas of your service might be enhanced by using technology?

What do you need (Knowledge? Skills? Something else?) To use technology more effectively?

What are the barriers to using technology more effectively in working with young people? How can you overcome them?

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