

Impressions from the eMEN event “E-mental health implementation: The digital revolution in mental health care”, in Düsseldorf

A retrospective

The eMEN event “E-mental health implementation: the digital revolution in mental healthcare” in Düsseldorf focused on the general framework that is necessary for the implementation of digital interventions in Germany. Around 120 participants joined the event that was hosted by the German Association for Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics (DGPPN), the German Alliance on Mental Health (ABSG) and the LVR Institute for healthcare research (LVR-IVF). Renowned national and international speakers presented their knowledge to the current research, gave practical insights in e-mental health routines and discussed about prerequisites to implementation in Germany.

The talks

At the beginning, Oyono Vlijter, Arq Foundation, Amsterdam, introduced the eMEN project. The transnational project consists of 10 partners from six different countries, from the Northwest Europe region. The aim of the project is to promote the development, dissemination and use of e-mental health applications to enable easy and affordable access to psychosocial care in Europe, says Vlijter.

Prof. Heleen Riper, VU University Amsterdam, highlighted the need for services to fill Europe-wide gaps in psychosocial care. She explained that in the EU, only about one third of patients with mental illnesses would receive treatment and waiting times are often long. Prof. Riper showed that high-quality digital applications can be effective interventions. E-Mental health care can be seen on a continuum from providing psycho-education to supporting daily functioning for severe conditions. Internet-based interventions, used in the right setting, could make an important contribution to psychosocial care.

Why, then, have e-mental health applications not been implemented in routine care in Germany, yet?

Karsten Knöppler, fbeta GmbH, a healthcare consulting firm, identified the short development cycles of digital applications as a major challenge for the implementation of digital interventions into the healthcare system. Knöppler made it clear that there are new methods, i.a. in the benefit assessment, in order to meet the special characteristics of these applications. At the same time, he emphasized that there is a great untapped potential for e-health applications, especially in acute and chronically ill patients.

Dr. Susanne Klein, Techniker Krankenkasse, a health care insurance provider, reported a growing demand for digital services. She was able to report first positive experiences with inter-

net-based interventions. In a model project, the health insurance provided guided online counselling for persons with mild to moderate depression. The results of the pilot project indicated good acceptance rates among participants and showed that online interventions may successfully be implemented into practice. She emphasized that internet-based interventions need to meet high quality standards and that online therapy should not be seen as a cost-effective alternative to routine care, but as an add-on.

Best-practice examples

Further insights into the use of e-mental health services in everyday care provided the best practice examples. Four initiatives and companies of different orientation presented their projects and gave an insight into the possibilities of e-mental health in various fields of use.

Prof. Martin Lambert, University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf, presented the e-mental health portal E-RECOVER of the RECOVER project in Hamburg. The project uses a holistic approach to improve the psychosocial care situation in the region. The E-RECOVER portal enables mental health professionals and patients to access relevant findings, share information and collaborate on treatment plans.

The Erasmus+ funded Therapy 2.0 project aims to train counselors mental health professionals in new ways of therapeutic interaction with "digital natives". Evelyn Schlenk, Innovation in Learning Institute, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, presented the project's comprehensive program, which addresses, among other things, the peculiarities of computer assisted communication in counseling and therapy, as well as providing assistance to practitioners on the legal and ethical aspects of online counseling and therapy.

Prof. Eva Meisenzahl, LVR-Klinikum Düsseldorf, presented another field of use of digital applications. In the PRONIA project, she focuses on the opportunities of computer-aided diagnostics of mental illnesses. Together with her colleagues, Prof. Meisenzahl, developed an e-mental health platform that combines findings from various sources and enables individualized, reliable e-health diagnostics.

Dr. Bart Schrieken, Interapy, Amsterdam, gave an insight into the implementation practice of the Netherlands, which is one of Europe's frontrunners concerning the use of e-mental health applications. Interapy offers guided interventions that are based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). During the course of the online therapy, patients will get support from a trained psychologist. Dr. Schrieken spoke about the beginnings of internet-based interventions in the Netherlands, making it clear that e-mental health services can make a significant contribution to psychosocial care.

The panel discussion

The final panel discussion was attended by both the President of the Federal Chamber of Psychotherapists, Dr. Ernst Dietrich Munz, and Dr. Franz Joseph Bartmann, President of the Medical Association Schleswig-Holstein and Chairman of the Telematics Committee of the German Medical Association. Further discussants were Prof. Eva Meisenzahl, LVR-Klinikum Düsseldorf, Dr. Iris

Hauth, DGPPN, Dr. Susanne Klein, Techniker Krankenkasse, and Karsten Knöppler, fbeta GmbH. The underlying theme of this discussion was that online-based interventions can be an effective tool that improves and enables better access to mental health care. E-mental health applications can be an additional offer to increase the range of mental health care services. The prerequisite for the use of digital applications are high quality standards. Clear criteria are needed to assess the quality of the products in order to provide patients and mental health professionals with guidance in a fast growing market. Integrating e-mental health into education and training is also needed to teach professionals how to use digital interventions properly. In order to keep pace with the growing demand for digital interventions, there is a need for active policy-making to drive implementation plans.

The seminar was conducted within the framework of the EU co-financed project eMEN and was the second of its kind in Germany. For more information on the project visit our website: www.nweurope.eu/emen.