

## Chapter 45

# Will Patients Accept Daily SMS as a Communication to Support Adherence to Mental Health Treatment?

### Daily SMS: Acceptance, Feasibility, & Satisfaction

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this article was to investigate the acceptability and feasibility of a daily Short Message Service (SMS) communication system to support patients attending weekly psychotherapy. The patients ( $N = 32$ ) received daily SMS messages for the duration of a group therapy treatment program. Measures relating to engagement, treatment satisfaction, acceptability of the intervention and treatment outcome were administered. The patient satisfaction and acceptability were high, with patients reporting positive attitudes towards the SMS messages, particularly with regards to increased motivation and perceptions of support. Symptom reduction over the course of treatment was consistent with expectations for transdiagnostic group psychotherapy. The current study indicates that SMS is a well-received form of communication that can be used to support engagement in psychotherapy treatment programs. Future research should focus on exploring the range of adjunctive technologies that may be used to support face-to-face therapies.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Psychological interventions are efficacious for the treatment of a range of mental and physical health conditions (e.g., Hoffman, Papas, Chatkoff, & Kerns, 2007; Kahana, Drotar, & Frazier, 2008; Lipsey & Wilson, 1993). However, there remains a high level of unmet need for psychological services, with most individuals in need of mental health services failing to receive treatment (Kazdin, 2017; Clough, B. A., Zarean, M., Ruane, I., Mateo, N. J., Aliyeva, T. A., & Casey, L. M. ). Technological adjuncts to psychological interventions may provide greater outreach and increased cost-efficiency of current services (Barnett & Scheetz, 2003; Clough & Casey, 2011b, 2015). Short Messaging Service (SMS) may have an important role to play in enhancing patient adherence to treatment tasks and recommendations. These messages have been helpful in prompting attendance in physical health settings (Guy et al., 2012), however, appointments in these settings are usually infrequent. Mental health appointments are typically associated with greater frequency and different demand and task characteristics. As such, it remains unknown as to whether patients will accept this technology on a frequent basis during psychotherapy. The study examined patients' responses to an adherence related SMS communication delivered on a daily basis during a psychotherapy program.

### **1.1. Adherence**

Patient adherence in psychotherapy refers to the extent to which patients' behaviours align with the advice given by the therapist or healthcare professional (Nose, Barbui, Gray, & Tansella, 2003). Despite the benefits associated with patient adherence to homework tasks, non-adherence is common. Whilst adherence to clinical medications has been estimated at approximately 50%, adherence with behavioural change programs is often even lower (Haynes, McDonald, & Garg, 2002). Poor patient adherence can result in increased costs associated with treatments, poor use of resources, and reduced treatment efficacy (Chen, 1991; Casey, L., & Clough, B., 2016). Use of adjunctive technologies in therapy has considerable potential to improve patient adherence (Clough & Casey, 2011c).

### **1.2. SMS Interventions**

To date, SMS technology has primarily been researched in the periods before and after therapy. Several studies have demonstrated that text messages may be effective in increasing patient readiness to change and facilitating help seeking behaviours among participants not already engaged in treatment programs (Joyce & Weibelzahl, 2011; Mason, Benotsch, Way, Kim, & Snipes, 2014). However, there have been mixed findings with regards to the use of SMS appointment reminders in psychotherapy clinics. Whilst some studies have found positive effects associated with these interventions (Branson, Clemmey, & Mukherjee, 2013; Sims et al., 2012), Clough and Casey (2014) found no beneficial effects associated with the messages and that patient dropout was in fact higher in the SMS condition. Similarly, Delgadillo, Moreea, Murphy, Ali & Swift (2015) found that SMS appointment reminders failed to influence therapy attendance or completion rates.

Text messaging has been used to target patient engagement and adherence following discharge from inpatient programs (e.g., Bauer, Okon, Meermann, & Kordy, 2012). However, the only study that has investigated SMS during treatment is that reported by Laursen (2010). A series of retrospective qualitative interviews with young people engaging in programs for cannabis use, indicated that regular text

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