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A randomised controlled trial to measure the impact of behavioural SMS reminders messages on missed appointments among IAPT patients

Submission date
06/02/2018

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
15/02/2018

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
04/04/2023

Condition category
Mental and Behavioural Disorders

[X] Prospectively registered
[ ] Protocol
[ ] Statistical analysis plan
[ ] Results
[ ] Individual participant data
[ ] Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
The NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services currently experience a relatively high rate of missed appointments (roughly 11%). This imposes a cost on the services and increases waiting times for others. The aim of this study is to test whether changes to the content of SMS (text message) reminders sent to IAPT patients before their appointments can reduce the rate of missed appointments. More specifically two different messages are tested against the existing business as usual message; one based on implementation intentions and the other on reciprocity. In addition to this, the study tests whether the behavioural messages can increase completion of treatment and ultimately improve mental health outcomes.

Who can participate?
Patients of one of the three participating IAPT services who have an appointment during the study period

What does the study involve?
Participants are randomly allocated to receive either the business as usual SMS reminder message or one of the two new messages. One of the new reminders asks the patient to take a moment to ensure that they are able to make their appointment. These messages are based on the psychological insight that asking people to consider the when, where and how of their behaviour can help translate intentions into action. The other new reminder lets the patient know that an appointment has been booked for them by their therapist. These messages are based on the concept of reciprocity whereby when someone does something on our behalf we reciprocate by going along with their request. All SMS messages are sent to patients 1-2 days before their appointment. The message also contains a prompt to rearrange the appointment if necessary. The messages purposely contain no message content that is clinical in nature. Appointment attendance and completion of treatment are recorded by the IAPT services at the end of the study period.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The new messages aim to increase the likelihood that patients attend their appointments.

Attending an appointment should increase the likelihood that the patient recovers and also help them recover sooner. Given that this study is being conducted with participants referred to or undergoing mental health treatment the main risk is that the new messages backfire and increase missed appointments or dropout. The messages have been carefully worded to guard against this happening.

Where is the study run from?
The study will be run at three participating NHS IAPT providers:
1. West London Mental Health Trust (UK)
2. Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust (UK)
3. Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust (UK)

When is study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
January 2017 to September 2018

Who is the main contact?
Edward Flahavan
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Contact information

Type(s)
Public

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
2017175

Study information

Scientific Title
A randomised controlled trial to measure the impact of behavioural SMS reminders messages on missed appointments among IAPT patients

Study objectives
The hypothesis is that changes to the wording of SMS appointment reminders informed by behavioural science can reduce the missed appointment rate among IAPT patients.

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Not provided at time of registration

Study design
Randomised controlled trial

Primary study design
Interventional

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Mild to moderate anxiety or depression

Interventions
The intervention in this trial is a change to the wording of the SMS appointment reminders sent to patients 1-2 days prior to their IAPT appointment. Method of randomisation is a random allocation mechanism with SQL. This will be carried out by our partner on the trial Mayden (the company who send the SMS messages). Patients of participating IAPT services will be allocated 1: 1:1 to receive either the business as usual SMS reminder messages or one of the two behavioural SMS treatment arms. Once allocated to a trial arm, the patient will receive messages from that arm for the duration of the trial period.

1. Control - this is the business as usual SMS reminder message.
2. Implementation plans - these reminders ask the patient to take a moment to ensure that they will be able to make their appointment. These messages are based on the psychological insight that asking people to consider the when, where and how of their behaviour can help translate intentions into action. The concept was developed by psychologist Paul Gollwitzer.
3. Reciprocity - these reminders let the patient know that an appointment has been booked for them by their therapist. These messages are based on the concept of reciprocity whereby when someone does something on our behalf we reciprocate by going along with their request. The Behavioural Insights Team found this to be effective in encouraging job seekers to attend careers fairs.

These SMS messages will be sent to patients 1-2 days before their appointment. The message will also contain a prompt to rearrange the appointment if necessary. The messages purposely contain no message content that is clinical in nature.

The trial will run for 4 months, data collected during this period will be collected for analysis. After that point no new data will be collected for the trial.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Recorded by the IAPT services at the end of the trial period:
1. Appointment attendance - whether or not a patient misses their appointment
2. Completion of treatment - whether or not a patient completes their treatment

Key secondary outcome(s))
Reliable recovery, assessed using the PHQ-9 and/or the GAD-7 at initial assessment and at the end of treatment (or last available appointment where an assessment was taken)

Completion date
01/09/2018

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Patients of all conditions, age and gender will be eligible
2. Patients has an appointment with one of the participating IAPT services during the trial period
3. Patient has consented to receive SMS communication from the service
4. Patient has supplied a valid mobile phone number to the service

Participant type(s)
Patient

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
01/03/2018

Date of final enrolment
01/07/2018

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust
Room 208 3rd Floor South Wing
St Pancras Hospital
4 St Pancras Way
London
United Kingdom
NW1 0PE

Study participating centre
Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
Drayton High Road
Norwich
United Kingdom
NR6 5BE

Study participating centre
West London Mental Health Trust (Ealing)
3rd Floor
84 Uxbridge Road
West Ealing
London
United Kingdom
W13 8RA

Study participating centre
West London Mental Health Trust (Hammersmith and Fulham)
1 Hammersmith Broadway
London
United Kingdom
W6 9DL

Sponsor information

Organisation
The Behavioural Insights Team

ROR
https://ror.org/03mk5b468

Organisation
Mayden House Ltd

Funder(s)

Funder type
Industry

Funder Name
Behavioural Insights Team

Funder Name
Mayden House Limited

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The participant level data is being shared with BIT for the trial in accordance with a data sharing agreement agreed with the participating IAPT providers. In this it is agreed that the raw data will not be made public. Though the data is anonymous the services are understandably very conscious of data protection issues.

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Participant information sheet	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes