

PREDI-NU project: Executive Summary from the final report

Introduction

This document presents an overview of the work and results from the project PREDI-NU (Preventing Depression and Improving Awareness through networking in the EU), which targeted depression and suicidal behaviour and was funded by the European Union in the framework of the Health Programme from September 2011 until August 2014.

Background, project scope and objectives

Depression and suicidal behaviour are two important and largely overlapping public health problems in Europe (Lönqvist et al., 2008). Unipolar depressive disorders are the third cause of disability-adjusted life-years in Europe (WHO, 2008) and depressive disorders are present in about half of people who die by suicide (Lönqvist et al., 2008; Cavanagh et al., 2003).

Despite the growing evidence base for effective treatment options for affective disorders, there are still major gaps in the treatment of mental disorders (Kohn et al., 2004), and complementary interventions in the provision of care for those suffering from a depression are required. Computerised cognitive behavioural therapy (cCBT) is one type of a lower intensity intervention recommended for the treatment of mild to moderate depression (NICE, 2009), and has the potential to complement existing treatment options for depression.

With this in mind, the PREDI-NU project's scope was to contribute to the promotion of mental health and prevention of depression and suicidal behaviour through information and communication technologies.

Specifically, it aimed to:

- Develop an internet-based guided self-management programme for mild and moderate depression (iFightDepression tool);
- Develop a depression awareness programme and design a website to increase knowledge and awareness of depression and suicidal behaviour (ifightdepression.com)
- Implement and evaluate an intervention programme involving the use of the iFightDepression tool in pilot regions in the following European countries: Spain, Hungary, Estonia, Germany and Ireland.

Work achieved and methods and means used

Throughout the three years project running time, all specific objectives were achieved. As planned, both the iFightDepression tool and awareness website were developed. In a study evaluating the acceptability of the tool and feasibility of its use, the tool was initially piloted in five European regions. The iFightDepression tool and the website were developed according to a consensus process involving the following steps:

Preparatory steps

- Extensive and systematic review of existing resources and the literature on internet-based programmes based on Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy.
- Development of content for the iFightDepression tool and website and programming of the resources as technical platforms.
- Discussion of these materials involving a consensus process among the consortium members, and involving a wider international panel of experts and representatives from patient and family organisations.
- Simultaneous development of training awareness modules for general practitioners (GPs) and mental health professionals (MHPs).

Pilot phase

- Introduction of the iFightDepression tool to GPs and MHPs via three-hour training and depression awareness workshops.
- Recruitment of patients using the iFightDepression tool and subsequent guidance of patients by trained professionals.
- Evaluation of the acceptability of the tool and feasibility of its use, via standardised questionnaires and focus groups.

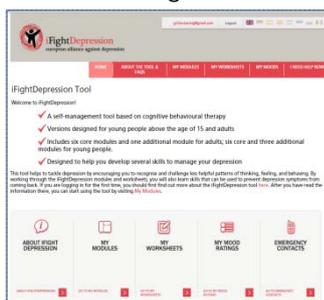
Enhancement and further implementation

- Enhancement of the iFightDepression tool (in terms of content, layout and technical features) based on the results from the pilot study.
- Dissemination of the iFightDepression results via regional launch events and further professional depression awareness workshops in the intervention regions, an international symposium in Brussels (April 1st, 2014), followed by the go-online of the website and a subsequent virtual launch via a google ad campaign.

Final results and their potential impact and use by the target group

Resulting from the aforementioned activities, the PREDI-NU project has produced the following main outputs:

- The iFightDepression self-management tool;
- The iFightDepression information and awareness website;
- Training materials for healthcare professionals interested in implementing iFightDepression.



The iFightDepression self-management tool is a multilingual internet-based guided self-management programme for adults and adolescents with minor, mild or moderate depression, and which is currently available in eight languages (English, German, Spanish, Catalan, Hungarian, Estonian, Bulgarian and Dutch) and two versions (for adults 25+ and young people aged 15-24). It is offered to patients via trained general practitioners or mental health professionals who subsequently guide the patients while using the tool. It is based on the principles of cognitive behavioural therapy and comprises

several online modules patients can work through at their own pace. It is further complemented by worksheets and exercises to allow users to consolidate the skills they are learning and to encourage self-management of depressive symptoms.



The iFightDepression website (www.ifightdepression.com) is multifaceted, with specific tailored information and recommendations for the general public, adults and young people, family and friends of depressed patients, community professionals and health care professionals. The website is currently available in 10 versions (English, German (German and Austrian version), Spanish, Catalan, Hungarian, Estonian, Bulgarian, Portuguese and French).

Figure 1: Homepages of the iFightDepression tool and website

With the involvement of approximately 200 patients and 160 healthcare professionals from regions in Hungary, Estonia, Ireland, Spain and Germany, the evaluation of the acceptability of the tool and the feasibility of its use demonstrated the multifaceted and complementary value as an additional resource for depression treatment:

- It is a therapeutic component to complement existing treatment options, which can be immediately offered and used in conjunction with face-to-face psychotherapy sessions to consolidate the skills learned in-session;
- It can be a first step in reducing the inhibition to search for professional help;
- It was highly appreciated by patients who cannot afford psychotherapy or are reluctant to spend money on it (especially in countries where psychotherapy is not offered free of charge);
- It can be a good preparatory step for psychotherapy, a suitable instrument for patients who do not require long-term psychotherapy or as an interim solution to bridge waiting periods to access psychotherapy;
- It is available on a continuous basis and may therefore be valuable for preventing relapse, and also including patients who initially suffered from severe depression, but subsequently had improved to the level of mild-moderate depression; and
- It may be helpful for a number of special settings such as patients with limited mobility due to physical illnesses or those suffering from hearing impairments.



Strategic relevance and contribution to the Health Programme

PREDI-NU contributed to the European Commission's Second Programme of Community Action in the Field of Health (2008-2013). The project's objectives are in line with a number of the aspects outlined in the "e-Health Action Plan 2012-2020 - Innovative healthcare for the 21st century" published by the European Commission in December 2012, as well as the following two of three key priorities of the EC Health Programme:

- Promoting health and reducing health inequalities, increasing healthy life years and promoting healthy ageing; and
- Generating and disseminating health information and knowledge, exchanging knowledge and best practice on health issues.

The final results do not only represent concrete instruments for an on-going contribution to the promotion of health and dissemination of health knowledge, but will also be further developed and sustainably implemented by the European Alliance Against Depression, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the improvement of depression care and prevention of suicidal behaviour.

Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout the project running time, the PREDI-NU project objectives were achieved with the development of the iFightDepression self-management tool, iFightDepression website, and iFightDepression professional training materials. Evaluation has demonstrated that these resources are both acceptable and feasible to the target groups of the project.

The multilingual iFightDepression website allows for a large scale implementation of the tool among European citizens who do not speak languages other than their native language, and to have access to high quality, accurate information about depression. Equally, the multilingual internet based iFightDepression self-management tool is a major asset, because in many countries the vast majority of depressed people have very limited or no access to psychotherapy at all.

While the uptake and interest of professionals was already very high in the participating study areas, we realised that for wider dissemination of the tool, an alternative means to face-to-face training was needed. As a result, the development of an e-learning programme has commenced to stimulate the use and dissemination of the iFightDepression tool and website in the future. As well as the tool and website it will be administered via the European Alliance Against Depression (www.eaad.net).

Stakeholders are encouraged to promote the wider use of the iFightDepression resources in Europe. In this context, it will be crucial to establish a framework that easily enables the use of evidence-based e-Health resources such as iFightDepression by relevant professionals. Additionally, it will be important to work collaboratively towards establishing a legal framework and stepped care models that enable the above and facilitate the use of online resources in the treatment of depression and other mental disorders.

References

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