WHAT’S NEW IN THE TREATMENT OF MDD?

By Mark L. Fuerst

Three recent studies focus on smartphone applications as self-management tools for depression; the effectiveness of antidepressant therapy in older adults; and strategies to improve treatment adherence.[1-3] Scroll through the slides for the latest findings and take-home messages.
Study 1.

Smartphone Apps May Help Reduce Depression

2. Older Adults With MDD Have Comparable Responses to Antidepressant Therapy as Younger Adults: A retrospective secondary data analysis was conducted from the Sequenced Treatment Alternatives to Relieve Depression (STAR*D) study for 2280 adults with MDD who received citalopram monotherapy. The patients included 106 older adults age 65 or older and 2174 adults under age 65.[2]

Following treatment, both older and younger adults experienced similar significant improvements in patient-reported depressive symptom severity, functioning, and quality of life. Older patients were more likely to have more severe depressive episodes of longer duration, but they responded to treatment as well as younger patients did.
CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results may be promising, but there is no evidence these apps alone can outperform standard psychological therapies or reduce the need for antidepressant medications.

Co-author John Torous, MD, Co-Director of the Digital Psychiatry Program at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and a Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in Boston, said: “Patients and doctors are faced with a vast array of mental health apps these days, and knowing which ones are actually helpful is imperative. This research provides much needed information on the effectiveness of apps for depression, and offers important clues into the types of apps which can help patients manage their condition.”
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Senior author Waguih William IsHak, MD, a psychiatrist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, CA, said: “In many health conditions, younger patients experience better recovery than elderly patients. This study shows that patients with major depressive disorder can experience improvement in functioning and quality of life after treatment, no matter their age. Many people who are depressed may not realize that there are treatments that can improve their lives, regardless of age.”
3. A Psychosocial Intervention Improves Early Adherence to Pharmacotherapy Among MDD Patients: In this randomized clinical trial, 231 middle-aged and older adults without significant cognitive impairment received newly initiated antidepressant therapy from their primary care physician and were recruited within 10 days of their prescription. They were randomly assigned to a brief psychosocial intervention or treatment as usual.[3]

The intervention group was 3 times more likely to be at least 80% adherent to antidepressant pharmacotherapy at both 6 and 12 weeks. While this did not have a sustained effect on depression, those who adhered showed greater reduction in depression severity by 24 weeks.
A brief psychosocial intervention that targets medication barriers can improve adherence to a newly initiated antidepressant regimen among middle-aged and older adults.
REFERENCES

