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Making the Most of Mobile Technology in Private Practice

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It comes as little surprise that the evolution of health care, including mental health, now includes an increasingly prominent role for technology. Mobile technology, in particular, is making strides because of its potential for tech-centered, multimodal clinical services for practitioners and clients alike (Luxton, McCann, Bush, Mishkind, & Reger, 2011). For clinical practices, the portability and immediacy that mobile technology affords makes for on-the-go access to information, multimedia (audio/video) recordings, and skills practice, as well as provide for creative ways to update traditional clinical methodologies.

Explosive Growth of Mobile Technology

Mobile technology takes many forms. The “platforms” by which it is available include handheld mobile devices such as smartphones and

tablets. To say that mobile technology has witnessed an explosion of use is not hyperbole. Perez (2012) noted that the networking company, Cisco Systems, report of the massive demands for mobile data will have the number of mobile devices exceeding the world’s population by the end of 2012. Indeed, the advent of smartphones represents the largest technology migration in global history and with a record 300% annual growth rate, smartphones are the fastest consumer technology adoption on record (MobiSource, 2011). Eighty-five percent of the U.S. population uses smartphones, represented by 48% iPhone (an Apple, Inc. product) users (Cuevas, et al, 2011).

For the first time ever, 2012 smartphone shipments outpaced the sale of traditional personal computers (Kain, 2012). According to Anderson and Wolff (2010), by 2014, mobile phones/smartphones will be the dominant method by which people access the Internet, and mobile software programs, “apps,” will replace the Web with its downloadable format, and websites will be mostly for desktop/laptop use.

In 2011, Apple’s App Store had sold more than \$4.3 billion in apps (Burrows, 2011). In March 2012, the store recorded with much fanfare its 25 billionth apps download (www.apple.com). With its multilingual and multicultural reach in 85 countries, Apple’s iOS software technology and its App Store center lead the field of mobile app development and distribution for iPhone, iPad, and iTouch users. Other competitors are not far behind, with Research in Motion Blackberry and Google’s Android fighting for a place at the center of the apps surge.

Early Adopters of Mobile Technology: Education and Medicine

In the U.S., no sector has seen greater use and early adoption of apps than education (Barber, 2012). Public and private schools alike are increasingly switching to classroom delivery of learning in the form of mobile technologies, such as tablets (e.g., iPads), thereby training a new generation of students and learners in the use of apps. In medicine, the prediction is that by 2015, 500 million people will be using healthcare apps (Mikalajunaite, 2010). Psychology is catching up and the prediction is that that mobile apps may be the new way psychology reaches the masses (Leis-Newman, 2011). According to a recent survey of perceptions of how the field of clinical psychology may change over the next twenty years, psychologists will be engaged in much more technology-assisted clinical services (M. Prinstein, personal communication, January 8, 2011).

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Security Issues of Mobile Technology Use in Clinical Practice

How can the use of apps in private practice settings enhance the clinical experience of clients and provide greater benefits for their treatment goals? Before considering the possibilities, it is important to realize the potential challenges and barriers that can preclude an effective implementation of mobile technology ideas. For example, privacy, confidentiality, data security, and risk management are all cornerstone issues to consider before integrating mobile technology into clinical work. A concise review of these issues is provided by Yuen, Goetter, Herbert, and Forman (2012). Because this technology is relatively new, work is still being done to provide professional guidelines, regulatory direction, and risk management principles. Telepsychology is a broad term encompassing not only apps, but also phone therapy, telehealth therapy (via Internet video), electronic medical records, text messaging, virtual therapy, etc. A Joint Task Force for the Development of Telepsychology Guidelines for Psychologists, with an emphasis on standards and protocols (DeAngelis, 2012) is underway and readers are encouraged to participate in the spring 2012 draft that will provide for a commentary period.

Integrating Mobile Technology in Clinical Practice

When considering incorporating mobile technology in clinical practice, a first step is asking what guides apps usage. In identifying the strategic objectives for adopting technology, is it for accessing information, recording data, or practicing skills? The next step is to develop a plan by which to select the necessary technology tools to implement in the practice. Questions to consider include the role of the app vis-à-vis the client, how the app can enhance client learning and goal achievement, the app's functionality in these roles, and the quality of a free vs. paid app.

Using Mobile Technology in the Community

As a practitioner of clinical neuropsychology and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), my practice has been enhanced by the affordability, adaptability, and portability of mobile technologies. With the clinical neuropsychology work, an important role in the provision of evaluation services is the explanation of testing results to individuals of differing knowledge base and professional backgrounds. In past years, when attending school meetings for student disability services, it would be with a laptop and DVDs and CDs in tow if it were important to illustrate a concussion with a video, or have the teaching staff view a clip of an national expert speaker addressing the educational and learning impacts of Tourette's Disorder.

With the advent of the iPad, the device can be handed around the room for viewing by individuals, as well as connected to a projector for group viewing. An excellent app for brain anatomy and brain injury information is FINR Brain Atlas 3 (Florida Institute for Neurologic Rehabilitation, Inc.). Also, being able to transfer DVDs to an iPad works seamlessly with DVD to iPad Converter for Mac software (Tipard). I have attended other meetings whereby (with proper authorizations) preschool teachers have presented school videos of recess play in order to highlight for team discussion aspects of child play interactions that may not appear to be neurotypical. When consulting with other health and education providers, I often introduce apps for them to use in their work. Athletic trainers who manage concussion issues have been inter-

ested in PAR, Inc.'s Care Sport Concussion Assessment & Response app for its ability to provide information guiding quick responsiveness to a head injury situation.


Using Mobile Technology at the Office

At the office for psychotherapy, mobile technology provides an additional source of bibliotherapy. A tablet like the iPad can contain many child therapy books (Virtual Help, Inc.). Many children already have familiarity with mobile technology through the use of games and relate readily to the electronic medium. Therapy with children can also include drawings. When drawings are not on paper but on a whiteboard, preserving the information can be challenging if the therapist does not have sufficient time to hand-copy the information before the next client appointment. A smartphone or tablet can take a picture of the whiteboard and send it to print on the local, office printer directly through a secure wireless Internet connection (Wi-Fi) (e.g., Print Magic app by Wellala, Inc.). In this way, the young patient can take home their drawing.

In providing CBT to adults, traditionally a piece of paper was the method by which clients tracked their automatic negative thoughts and challenged them. Several CBT apps, such as iCBT (Bonfire Development Advisors), are now available for adults to use any time a situation arises that could be helped by the CBT approach. The iCBT app provides for saving the information or sharing it by way of e-mail. The convenience and portability of the app helps maximize compliance with assigned homework as there is greater chance it will be remembered and not lost as can occur with a paper version.

Tablets can be connected to television screens so that CBT app work can be done collaboratively between client and therapist, much as it has been done traditionally on a piece of paper or whiteboard. Interactive therapeutic apps for children's social skills such as The Social Express (Language Express, Inc.) can also be viewed on a screen in the office. For example, in working with developmentally disabled children, teaching them and their parents in the use of electronic versions of Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS), e.g., Communicating Basic Needs app (Special Learning, Inc.), connecting the iPad to the T.V. screen helps to learn how to use the app. With mobile devices, teaching relaxation with audio tracks can be streamed via Bluetooth to speakers in the office during the session.

Staying Up to Date with Advances in Mobile Technology and Psychology

Mobile technology's application to psychology is still in its infancy but holds great promise. With the increase in app use in the field, it will be important to study and measure if the availability of different therapy tools' delivery formats makes a difference regarding the usefulness of treatment services, what is the impact of apps on achievement of treatment goals, and client reports of effectiveness. Finding apps can be a challenge when so many have been created to date. A useful app for finding apps is Chomp. For reviews on psychology apps, readers can join Sylvain Roy, PhD's LinkedIn group, Mobile Apps for Psychologists, and for staying abreast of this evolving field, the journal *Telemedicine and e-Health* is available. 



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Yvette Tazeau, PhD, is the CEO and Founder of TikalBayTek, Inc., a Silicon Valley company that applies behavioral sciences to mobile technology (www.tikalbaytek.com). The company creates apps and provides consulting services to assist clinicians in adding technology to their practices. Dr. Tazeau is also a licensed psychologist specializing in Clinical Neuropsychology and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (www.drtazeau.com). She also practices as a Management Consultant (www.yntconsulting.com). Her e-mail address is info@tikalbaytek.com.