

Depression Assist: Protocol for a novel online program for family & friends of adults with major depressive disorder

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Background

Caring for someone with major depressive disorder doesn't come with a guidebook

Good social support can help with depression, whereas interpersonal stress can make it worse. Depression is largely managed in the community and people with major depressive disorder (MDD) commonly turn to family and friends for support. These supporters often lack information about how to be supportive and become distressed and develop health problems themselves [1-3]. Relationships and family suffer. There is an urgent need to find accessible and engaging ways to reduce carer distress, and better equip them for their vital supportive role. Clinicians rarely have time to address the needs of these informal supporters [4]. Many carers turn to the convenience and privacy of the Internet for information and support, but there is little evidence-based online guidance and training to assist them [5].

Aims

We aim to develop and formatively evaluate an online information and training program

We aim to develop Depression Assist (DA), a comprehensive multi-module online information, training and support program designed specifically for partners, close friends, and family of people with MDD. The idea is not to replace face-to-face counselling for carers, but to create an easily accessible resource that could be integrated as part of a stepped care approach. Once the DA program has been developed, we will conduct a formative evaluation to assess its acceptability, usability and usefulness to these informal supporters and update the program accordingly.

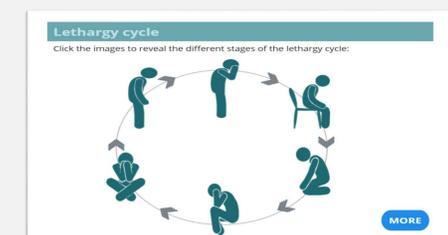
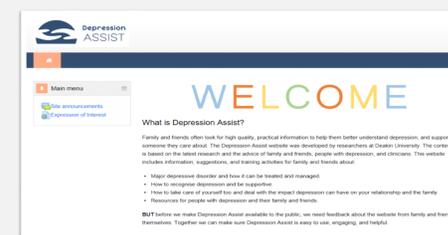
Depression Assist study Roadmap



Methods

01 Three Delphi panels (N=79 carers, clinicians and people with MDD) completed online surveys. Items endorsed by > 80% of panel members informed the content of DA.

02 eLearning materials were created based on results of the Delphi study. The website that hosts the program is being developed. The content is being organised into modules:



03 Study documents have been prepared. We will recruit 20 carers of an adult with MDD

04 Participants access DA anytime for 8 weeks. Assessments will be as follows:



Results

05 Feedback survey responses will be analysed according to Braun and Clarke's thematic approach, grounded theory and Charmaz' coding method. Descriptive statistics and univariate tests will explore participants' characteristics and outcome measures. User engagement metrics will measure attrition.

06 Based on the formative evaluation, we will upgrade the program and prepare it for randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to assess DA's effect on distress, wellbeing and health of both people with MDD and their informal supporters, and the cost-effectiveness of the program.

Depression Assist is an accessible and novel intervention that could reduce carer distress, improve informal support and help reduce symptoms in people with major depressive disorder.

Acknowledgements

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