



Digital Solutions for Mental Health: A Critical Look at the Present Reality

Eunjoo Kim

Department of Psychiatry, Gangnam Severance Hospital, Yonsei University College of Medicine, Seoul, Korea

In an era saturated with digital stimuli, the younger generation of today is increasingly immersed in the digital world. Surrounded by smartphones, tablets, virtual reality (VR), and a multitude of social media platforms, they find themselves at the crossroads of unparalleled opportunities and challenges. This digital landscape not only offers insight into their recreational activities but carries profound implications for their mental health and overall well-being.

The rapid technological progress witnessed in recent years, particularly in the realm of digital therapeutics, is commendable. These innovative solutions have proven to be instrumental during unforeseen challenges, such as the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Tools such as smartphone applications, chatbots, VR, metaverse, and artificial intelligence are increasingly recognized for their potential as accessible and scalable mental health interventions that can replace or augment traditional care. Research and clinical evidence for the use of these new technological approaches across various mental health contexts is mounting. This evidence covers their efficacy in self-managing psychological well-being, early intervention, and clinical management of long-term psychiatric conditions, such as major depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders, and eating and substance use disorders, as well as neurodevelopmental and psychiatric disorders in children and adolescents.

However, the digital age is not without its concerns. With increased screen time and digital immersion, concerns have arisen regarding the physical and psychological impacts of such changes on the youth. We have heard alarming reports on platforms promoting self-harm, cyberbullying, online sexual abuse and exploitation, online gambling, breaches of personal data and security, and the spread of misinformation. Thus, children and adolescents stand as the generation that benefits the most from digital technology while being the most at risk. In light of this reality, determining how to use digital therapeutics wisely for the management of men-

tal disorders while minimizing the adverse effects is a critical issue. This serves as a potent reminder that significant innovation carries substantial responsibilities.

Therefore, mental health professionals must make concerted efforts to understand the characteristics of the devices and digital content that are widely used by children and adolescents. However, a significant generational gap in digital knowledge and literacy exists, and staying ahead of rapidly changing digital device trends and youth media use patterns is realistically challenging for adults. In such circumstances, adults must educate children about online safety and nurture their critical thinking skills to safeguard them from harmful content. Furthermore, ongoing discussions are essential concerning the privacy risks associated with children and teenagers using digital media. Mental health professionals can play a pivotal role in recognizing and addressing issues related to media use that negatively impact the health, well-being, and development of children and adolescents.

In this Special Section, titled “Digital Therapeutics and Digital Adversity,” we delve deeply into this intricate landscape. Through a series of review articles, we explore the current state of digital therapeutics, conduct a systematic review of the efficacy of VR therapy, examine the intricate relationship between digital media use and mental health, and dissect the emerging legal and ethical challenges posed by these innovations. These contributions stem from diverse disciplines and offer comprehensive insights that are indispensable for shaping our understanding and approach to digital interventions.

As we continue to navigate this digital era, it is imperative that we establish robust frameworks for discerning the benefits and risks of pathological media use. Child and adolescent psychiatrists must possess the knowledge to guide the younger generation through these digital mazes. Recognizing the nuances of media consumption based on age, developmental stage, personality, and content can aid in cultivating a healthier digital environment.

Moving forward, policy decisions grounded in solid scientific evidence and comprehensive studies on the efficacy,

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safety, and applicability of digital therapeutics have become paramount. Furthermore, formulating compensation structures within the confines of the national health insurance system is essential. These scholarly endeavors are not only vital for the judicious acceptance and regulation of digital therapeutics but also instrumental in advancing subsequent research. Prioritizing accessibility to digital therapeutics

while safeguarding youth from potential digital adversities should be a central concern.

My sincere hope is that this special section serves as a beacon, illuminating the path towards the harmonious integration of digital technology and mental health care in the lives of children and adolescents.