

Feasibility of Online Health Coaching for Canadian Armed Forces Personnel Receiving Treatment for Depression, Anxiety and PTSD

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Abstract : Program/Intervention Description: The Canadian Armed Forces(CAF) Mental Health Clinic treat a full spectrum of mental disorder, addictions, and psychosocial issues that include Major Depressive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and other diagnoses. We evaluated the feasibility of an online health coach intervention delivering mindfulness based cognitive behavioral therapy (M-CBT) and behaviour change support for individuals receiving treatment at CAF Clinics. Participants were provided accounts on NexJ Connected Wellness, a digital health platform, and 16 weeks of phone-based health coaching, emphasizing mild to moderate aerobic exercise, a healthy diet, and M-CBT content. The primary objective was to assess the feasibility of the online delivery with CAF members. Evaluation Methods: Feasibility was evaluated in terms of recruitment, engagement, and program satisfaction. We additionally evaluated health behavior change, program completion, and mental health symptoms (i.e. PHQ-9, GAD-7, PCL-5) at three time points. Results: Service members were referred from Vancouver, Esquimalt, and Edmonton CAF bases between August 2020 and January 2021. N=106 CAF personnel were referred, and n=77 consented. N=66 participated, and n=44 completed 4-month and follow-up measures. The platform received a mean rating of 76.5 on the System Usability Scale, and health coaching was judged the most helpful program feature (95.2% endorsement), while reminders (53.7%), secure messaging (51.2%), and notifications (51.2%) were also identified. Improvements in mental health status during active interventions were observed on the PHQ-9 (-5.4, $p < 0.001$), GAD-7 (-4.0, $p < 0.001$), and PCL-5 (-4.1, $p < 0.05$). Conclusion: Online health coaching was well-received amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns. Uptake and engagement were positively reported. Participants valued contacts and reported strong therapeutic alliances with coaches. Healthy diet, regular exercise, and mindfulness practice are important for physical and mental health. Engagements in these behaviors are associated with reduced symptoms. An online health coach program appears feasible for assisting Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

Keywords : coaching, CBT, military, depression, mental health, digital

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