

SelfEcho's Mobile Therapy featured in Business Times

The Pacific Coast Business Times featured Mobile Therapy in this week's edition including quotes from the world renowned Dan Gilbert, PhD - partner in SelfEcho, Inc.



Mood ring, rebooted: SelfEcho's app tracks psychological metrics

The team behind Santa Barbara-based startup SelfEcho is betting that big data can help us better understand ourselves.

Last month it released an app called Mobile Therapy that charts users' emotional state by harvesting smartphone information to give therapists a clearer picture of their patients' well-being between therapy visits. Since going live last November, 200 clinicians across the U.S. have subscribed to the \$50-a-month service.

The app joins controversial mobile health apps such as MIT incubator Ginger.io and

MY3, a state-funded suicide prevention resource, in extracting and interpreting personal smartphone data to compile an overview of a user's psychological ups and downs. But as a tool for mental health professionals, Mobile Therapy differs from other mobile health technology in that it is essentially an extension of the confidential patient-doctor relationship.

"This tool invades your privacy like a stethoscope does," said Daniel Gilbert, a professor of psychology at Harvard University and the app's senior scientific director. "We're not collecting data on people who use the app, and the data isn't going to anybody but the licensed health care professionals."

Mobile Therapy is also entirely HIPAA-compliant and encrypts information at every level. The system uses self-reported metrics alongside algorithms that, for example, provide a linguistic analysis of the words used in outbound emails and social media broadcasts. Gilbert said users' recording of emotions as they experience them improves therapy results since the burden of recollection is no longer placed on humans' faulty memory.

"People are good at answering how they are feeling right now," Gilbert said. "If someone is having a good day, they tend to think they've had a good week, and a bad day may cause them to report a bad week. How happy you are feeling or remember feeling might not tell them a lot about what was really going on with you throughout the week." UC Santa Barbara psychology professor Jonathan Schooler, who helped develop the app's data algorithms, said that aggregated over multiple check-ins, the information can provide a sense of trends over time and general experiences of self-esteem and well-being that the patient themselves may not be aware of.

"This is a really intriguing idea," Schooler said, "that the patient may have a hard time coming out and expressing particular issues when they're in session but when they're recording it automatically throughout the day, you may get experiences that they hadn't mentioned in general therapy."

According to a study conducted by Sigma Research for SelfEcho, 66 percent of clinical psychologists surveyed said obtaining additional patient data via a mobile app would enhance their ability to treat patients.



The SelfEcho team, from left: Chief Financial Officer Allen Urban; CEO Jacques Habra; Jonathan Schooler, scientific adviser and partner; Director of Operations DJ Wetmore; Shelly Gable, scientific adviser and partner; Chief Technology Officer Chuck Toussieng; and investors Jim Westby and Herbert Tews. (Photo courtesy SelfEcho)

"We provide this whole thing to the clinician on a dashboard so they're able to understand what's really going on with their client and provide better treatment and faster diagnosis," SelfEcho CEO Jacques Habra said. "So far, it seems to be working."

Habra said he originally began the company to analyze the tremendous personal data footprint created by modern smartphone use to help people live a happy and more fulfilling life. But after realizing early on that the average person didn't understand the psychological significance of the data, he enlisted the help of the nation's top psychology experts including Gilbert and John Weisz from Harvard, Schooler and Shelly Gable from UCSB, and James Pannebaker, chair of the psychology department at the University of Texas at Austin.

The group is still fine-tuning Mobile Therapy's data aggregation techniques and bringing on additional specialists in various areas of clinical psychology to refine the system's ability to zero in on symptoms specific to an illness or disorder. However, Schooler said the app is already sensitive to the fact that each diagnosis comes with a unique set of

concerns and allows practitioners to modify the questions a patient is prompted with. "One of the really elegant things about Mobile Therapy is that the clinician can very intuitively swap in and swap out the questions a patient is prompted with, even throughout the week, allowing them to ask very specific questions for particular triggers and have the ability to customize that for individual patients," he said. "We see this as a collaboration with the therapists - we're allowing therapists to take their individual knowledge and expertise and really pin-point the issues that individual patients are experiencing."

According to Habra, about 60 percent of the doctors approached by the company have adopted Mobile Therapy. And though the app has not been in use long, he said at least six therapists have said they're seeing better outcomes and more enriching sessions. "It's almost like they've been waiting for this," Habra said. "The reality is that there are a tremendous amount of undocumented hours in between sessions that are very important to somebody's well-being and someone's behavioral health that therapists have to fill in the blanks on their own and have a very difficult time doing so."

Though the product has so far been marketed to clinicians, Habra said the company will also begin recommending they posit it as a patient service for which therapists charge a monthly rate.

"Since we are asking the clinicians to spend a little extra time - five minutes before a session and then five minutes after a session - so that they can modify the data that's being collected, we are suggesting that the clinician charge a monthly fee for that extra service to their client," Habra said. "So they may pay anywhere from \$10 to \$50 a month to use Mobile Therapy and fundamentally get better treatment, better service, and more time from their clinician."

SelfEcho is seeking certification as a continuing education instructor to offer its own Mobile Therapy course through which psychologists can earn continuing education credits.

The company is also in conversation with Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara as well as Harvard and the University of North Carolina to introduce the platform to the schools' research psychology students. "The idea is that if graduate students are familiar

with the platform at a young age, when they go and start practicing the hope is that they of course keep using Mobile Therapy," Habra said. Habra said that, as a disruptive technology, the app is likely to be adopted slowly at first but "it's just a matter of time."

"It's clear that people are going to start looking for some sort of a distance psychology or mobile psychology type of services and tools," he said. "We're going to be there when they do that."