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Technology-based interventions for mental health promotion in later life: An evidence review

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Background

Given a changing demographic landscape, supporting healthy ageing is a public health issue. Recently, the role of technology-based tools in health promotion work has been highlighted. This systematic review analysed the available evidence on the effectiveness of technology-based interventions for the promotion of mental wellbeing among older adults.

Methods

The data originates from an evidence review project conducted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in the UK. Systematic searches were performed in 8 bibliographic databases and publications from the period 2003–2014 were considered. The target population was people

aged 65+ without extensive health or social care needs. Psychosocial interventions examining mental wellbeing and independence outcomes (e.g. life satisfaction, empowerment, social resources) were analysed.

Results

From the original review data material, 25 intervention studies were extracted covering technology use for educational purposes, computer/internet exposure or training, telephone/internet communication and computer gaming. The number of studies employing an RCT design and analysing comparable outcomes was low, resulting in the evidence strength being moderate and somewhat inconsistent. Four out of six studies with higher quality ratings (all focused on computer/internet training), reported statistically significant positive effects on psychosocial outcomes among intervention recipients.

Conclusions

The importance of digital inclusion and related training initiatives should be highlighted in the promotion and protection of wellbeing in later life. More methodologically rigorous studies are warranted, evaluating the influence of technology use in active and healthy ageing.

Key messages:

- Older adults must not be overlooked in the implementation of innovative health-promoting initiatives
- Effective technology-based interventions with a psychosocial approach can serve as best practice examples in this pioneer field