

Case Study

The use of Overcoming Bulimia Online and
Overcoming Anorexia Online at the Maudsley
Hospital London



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Overcoming Bulimia Online (OBO)

Where has OBO been used and by whom?

The OBO intervention is being used at the Maudsley Hospital in their Outpatient Eating Disorder Service. They offer the intervention to all those suitable as part of a stepped care approach.

Patients can start using OBO either after their initial assessment or during their outpatient treatment.

How do they assess patient's suitability?

The clinician recommending OBO to the patient makes sure that the patient has access to broadband internet and that they are comfortable in their use of a computer.

The patient completes a physical and mental health risk assessment prior to using OBO. If the patient is deemed moderate/high risk due to their mental and physical health, consideration is given as to whether OBO is suitable for the level of monitoring and support the patient needs. The patient may need an additional service.

OBO is only recommend to the patient if their eating disorder has clinical features that suggest using the package may be helpful to them, i.e. bingeing or vomiting symptoms. In line with NICE guidelines, for those patients who do not have co-morbidity and for those that do but are well supported in the community, assessors encourage patients to complete OBO and a review and further assessment takes place as to whether they would need further treatment or not in the form of one to one therapy.

“As a possible first step, patients with bulimia nervosa should be encouraged to follow an evidence-based self help program.” (NICE)

Whilst the patient is using OBO

The patient is encouraged to complete no more than 1 or 2 sessions per week and a time limit of 4 months is given for supported completion of the OBO program, unless discussed otherwise.

Email support is adopted in which the practitioner contacts the patient weekly and they stipulate that patients should contact them weekly. If the patient is not heard from patients for three consecutive weeks then e-mail support is withdrawn and the patient is invited for a review.

The content of the email support consists of encouragement, praising and acknowledging standpoint as well as advising about re-visiting modules and which particular modules might help with their particular concerns.

Practitioners review the patients progress weekly, seeing whether they have logged on, their Hospital Anxiety and Depression (HAD) scores as well as which sessions the patient has completed.

Comments and Findings

Practitioners

The Maudsley have found the OBO program particularly useful with those who do not have co-morbidity and that those who manage to reach session four out of the eight available, complete the whole of the course and are able to change something, if not become bulimia free. In addition to this they also found that the patients need less face to face therapy after using the OBO program.

Practitioners find that the remote management of three patients is equivalent to one patient face to face session which is helping their busy waiting list.

Patients

Here are some of the comments collected from the patients using the OBO program:

In terms of email support given:

“...e-mail is better for me because I can actually keep the email and go back to it...”

“...with e-mail I find, you've got time to think about what message you want to get over more clearly.”

In terms of the OBO program:

“this was really focused on now and the future and that was really good because the past is the past, you can't change it, but you can change the future so that's what I really liked.”

“...I mean, yeah, it's just a computer but you know that at the end of the line there is people who were watching your responses and watching your progress and that's encouraging.”

“...it makes the programme real. You think ok, I am not just doing something on the screen...actually there is someone behind it...”

Findings

The Overcoming Bulimia Online program was previously in CD-ROM format. The first Randomised Control Trial (RCT) that the Maudsley Hospital completed used the Overcoming Bulimia CD-ROM:

- 76 patients took part in the study, half of the patients used the OB CD-ROM and the other half were on a waiting list.

- OB CD-ROM resulted in substantial improvements in eating symptoms, affective symptoms and quality of life.

Outcome data for the Maudsley Hospital's progress with Overcoming Bulimia Online will be available soon.

Issues the Maudsley Hospital have had with OBO

- Misconceptions about self help as a "fob off"
- Right time/right place/right circumstances, user comment:

"I would like to start the program as soon as possible.....(after a month of no contact) I think I found the sessions a bit daunting and keep meaning to start. I will make the effort this week as I still do want to continue with the program."

Overcoming Anorexia Online



Where has the OAO intervention been used and by whom?

The Overcoming Anorexia Online intervention is currently been used for research purposes by Miriam Grover at the Institute of Psychiatry (IOP) Section of Eating Disorders. This 'We CAN' study is in connection with Beat the UK's leading eating disorder charity and is being funded by the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust.

Carer's taking part in the study are offered offer weekly e-mail or 20 minutes telephone support each week and they are encourage to try and log onto the OAO website weekly to complete a session. The support the carers receive lasts for four months and they have two additional monthly follow up sessions. Full details and outcome data will be available shortly but the overall feedback from carer's has been positive, showing that carers find at least one or two things particularly useful.

A very successful research paper again carried out by Miriam Grover at the IOP and funded by the Maudsley, looked at an offline pilot of the OAO program, which used the workbook part of the course with the carers. The workbooks detail everything that is covered in each session of the course. This paper has just been submitted for publication to the International Journal of Eating Disorders.

Main findings:

- The levels of the carer's anxiety and depression both significantly improved over time.
- Significant improvements were also found for: the experiences of care-giving, impact of eating disorder symptoms and levels of expressed emotion.

- The improvements above remained improved during the follow-up period, even without practitioner support.

Comments from carers:

- Many carers commented that they wished they could have had access to the OAO intervention as soon as they became aware of their sufferers anorexia and stated that if they had access to OAO earlier the sufferer's illness may have taken a different course.

The outpatient eating disorder unit at the Maudsley Hospital is looking into improving their help and resources for carers and parents of those who have an eating disorder. Once the research detailed above has been completed discussion of where the OAO program will fit will take place.