Developing an Innovative Mental Health Communication Resource for Professionals

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Background
It can be quite a challenge to communicate the concepts of psychiatric phenomenology to patients who have intellectual disabilities, to those without English-language skills and to people with literacy difficulties. However, the availability of “easy-to-understand” symbols to conduct a mental state examination is limited.

Aim
To address this gap, the medical authors worked with the communication and design team at Widgit Software, a company that has developed symbols over the last 30 years for use in a wide variety of settings from Education to Health and which have been published in multiple countries worldwide.

The team at Widgit has created a “one stop” symbol resource to support mental health professionals to help them communicate more easily with their patients. Using terminology derived from the present state examination, clinical experience and the widely-accepted structure of the mental state examination, each phenomenological symbol was developed with a graphic designer.

Implications and Limitations
Individuals have their own, specific communication needs, so no single system can meet the needs of all. However, a “one stop” resource which provides a comprehensive collection of mental health-related symbols will potentially benefit a wide range of patients. It may also enable health and legal professionals to enhance their communications as well as those working in a variety of other settings, for example in the courts, penal establishments, and commercial companies.

Communication Book
Once a prototype booklet was agreed, paper based versions and “key card” symbols were printed to trial in clinical situations (work in progress). At the same time, the Widgit team have created an electronic version of the booklet enabling symbols to be seen individually and enabling these symbols to be used to create bespoke documents (using SymWriter 2). The Psychiatric Communication Books with Widgit Symbols are a dynamic resource which can be updated and modified according to feedback from wider clinical use.

Symbol Development & Schema

More Information
If you would like to trial the Psychiatric Communication resource within your service, please contact Dr Geoff Marston:
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