TO	Chair, and Members of Queensland Government Mental Health Select Committee	
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DATE	4th February 2022	
SUBJECT	Improving mental health outcomes through the innovative use of digital communications	

Improving Mental Health Outcomes Through Better Communications

Summary

With nearly 1 in 2 (46%) Australians aged 16–85 experiencing a mental disorder during their lifetime[1], we need to embrace all opportunities available to us to support and improve the health outcomes of those who struggle to maintain good mental health.

For this reason, it is crucial to recognise

- the importance that **effective communication** plays in mental health recovery[2] and
- the role that **innovative digital technologies can play in delivering such communications** bringing with it improvements in patient
    - **autonomy**,
    - **empowerment**,
    - **activation** and
    - **relationships with clinicians and care-givers**[3].

Our proposal is not that digital communication should be used as a substitute for face-to-face therapeutic communications, but rather, that digital communication can be a valuable additional component in a hybrid model of patient care. Such an approach provides

- the **patient with a voice** and the ability to be **more engaged in in their mental health journey**,
- **patient-centric communications** with a **singular view of a patient's journey** for all care providers,
- **contextualised support** aligned with individual health journeys and **responsive to journey events**, and
- a network of support and therapeutic relationships via a **patient-authorised 'circle of care'**.

Improving Patient Autonomy

Moving from a traditional model of organisation-centred guardianship to an approach that emphasises mediated autonomy - personal advisory of patients, providing safety, support, and protection without removing control over their own lives[4] - is fundamental to recovery as it provides patients with a growing sense of personal control, self-agency and the ability to choose[5].

Employing a digital platform for health communications can build patient autonomy by enabling them to

- **Set personal goals and track their own progress** with interactive support from clinical team, friends and family (Circle of care).
- **Document and share their mental health journey** and in the process provide them with a voice and reduce the need to retell their story time and time again.
- **Diarise triggers, symptoms and medication side effects** to enable better diagnosis, progress tracking, and dynamic notification of journey events to circle of care team members.
- **Contextual delivery of support and education information** based on self-reported triggers, symptoms and medication side effects.
- Better **understand and self-manage their conditions** on a long term basis.

Empowering Patients

Many models of care purport to be 'patient-centric' when in reality patients remain at the periphery of the care process with organisations or clinicians at the centre. Patients have little input into, or control over, their own health journeys.

Employing a digital platform for health communications can empower patients by enabling them to

- **Participate in their own journey** by interacting with their care team.
- **Document their mental health journey** and **choose who to share it with**.
- **Invite clinicians, carers, family and friends to a trusted 'circle of care'** to share in their journey.
- **Authorise the sharing of their mental health journey events and health data** with their clinicians and other members of their circle of care.

Activating Patients

For mental health services to be effective, patients must be engaged and activated to participate in their own care[6]. A key component of treatment is the individual's understanding, competence, and willingness to participate in care decisions and processes.

Employing a digital platform for health communications can assist in activating patients by providing

- a '**safe zone**' for patients to
  - **document and discuss** their health journey,
  - **locate educational** information from trusted providers, and
  - **gain support** from an authorised circle of care.
- Opportunities for **building understanding** and **receiving peer-support** by connecting patients with Patient Support Associations.
- Patient feedback mechanisms allowing a **more participatory approach for decision making**.
- **Reduced 'clinician fatigue'** by providing a single place for circle of care team members to review patient progress.
- Sequenced communications **aligned with individualised treatment plans** and **responsive to changing health journey events.**
- **Timely supportive and encouraging prompts** from 'circle of care' members.

Relationships with clinicians and care-givers

The building of collaborative, mutually respectful, partnership-based relationships with a support team is key to decreasing the burden of illness experienced by individuals and essential when optimizing their care[7].

Employing a digital platform for health communications can assist in building collaborative supportive relationships by providing

- a mechanism for **multiple care-givers to engage in a collaborative relationship** with a patient,
- an **avenue for informed peer-support** through the authorised inclusion of patient associations within a patient's circle of care,
- a fostering of **whole-of-sector, patient-centric** communications approach that is seamless andis aligned with the patient journey,

- recognition and sponsoring of the **unique role of personal and family relationships** in
  - **promoting well-being**,
  - **providing care** and
  - **fostering recovery,**
- a reduction in the **'siloed' care provided disparate and often isolated practitioners**.

Who is Liquid State and what is PEP Health?

Liquid State is an experienced provider of communications solutions to enterprise and government organisations both locally in the Australian environment and internationally. The company has developed dozens of communication solutions, with millions of pieces of content under management, as part of hundreds of health communication pathways being delivered to thousands of users across six countries in four languages.

Liquid State developed PEP Health, an off-the-shelf health communications product used by community clinics, general practitioners, health clinics, and hospitals to design, produce and deliver health and wellbeing programs to community members and patients, and monitor their progress.

The PEP Health platform has been purpose built to deliver effective communications between patients and members of their care team and in the process deliver patient autonomy, empowerment and activation with their own health journey.

References

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