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THE ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM DEPRESSION: CHANCES AND RISKS

U. Hegerl, A. Blume, C. Rummel-Kluge

University of Leipzig, Dept. of Psychiatry, Leipzig, Germany

Introduction: We evaluated participation effects and motives of people participating in an online discussion forum for depressive patients.

Objectives/Aims: Characteristics of participants, diagnoses and treatment status were analysed. In addition, the effects of participation in the forum on the individual handling of the illness and their motivation to use the online forum were examined.

Methods: 55 active users were interviewed by telephone using a computer-assisted version of a fully structured psychiatric interview (DIA-X) and online with the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI).

Results: 52 study participants (94.5%) received the diagnosis depression. Currently, 36.5% of the respondents suffer from a depressive episode. 90.2% received outpatient treatment before, 64.7% inpatient treatment. The respondents stated that their trust in medical treatment was raised (63.3%) and that they were encouraged to seek professional help (61.2%).

Conclusion: The forum reaches its targets, namely to provide an information platform for depressive patients and their relatives to encourage patients to seek professional help and the users do not see it as an alternative, but rather as a supplement to professional and psychological care. By participating in the forum, aspects of self-help, especially a strengthened sense of community and acceptance of coping with the own illness-related situation can be accomplished.

The results of this study as well as first results of a current research project, an evaluation of the content by analyzing word counts in psychological and linguistic categories, will be presented in the context of chances and risks of this E-mental health tool.