Introduction

- Despite the number of digital based health information systems increases steadily, the effectiveness in reaching long term health goals or life style change mostly remain unproven.
- Therefore it is essential to find simple and novel therapeutic approaches.
- Effects of text-based healthcare chatbots (THCB) have been proven (1) & tested in public health interventions against alcohol or tobacco (2).
- The aim: test a novel design of a health app for overweight adolescents, whether it supports their motivation to participate in a lifestyle intervention including relaxation and activity exercises supported by a THCB.

Methods

- 12-month randomized controlled study
- Mobile chat app with game character based on an open source platform with a THCB (Anna or Lukas)
- Direct communication between patients and health professionals (HP) via a second chat channel (fig. 1, left part).
- Sensor integration provided measurement of physical activity.
- Daily challenges during 24 weeks (steps per day, breathing exercises, photos of nutrition and home environment, questions on well-being and eating habits)
- Patients could earn virtual rewards in case of 24 weeks intensive phase of intervention with 4 on-site visits will be compared to a treatment-as-usual group with monthly visits.
- *: outcome: BMI-z-score after 12 months
- Other outcomes: compliance with therapy, fitness-test; questionnaires on eating habits & disorders, mental health and quality of life

Results

- At start: 22 patients (39% girls), no difference in age an BMI-SDS in both groups: 14.2 y (11.9 –17); BMI-SDS 2.56 SD (1.7 –3.5)
- At 5.5 months evaluation: 20 patients (13 PM2, 7 controls, 2 drop-out for psychiatric problems)
- 18064 conversational turns (CTs) during 5.5 months & 13 patients, i.e. 8.6 CTs per Day
- 67% of the patients hat >4 THCB CT/day
- 43% fulfilled daily challenges completely and successfully (fig. 3)
- Open chat questions, mainly on technical issues, took place in 3.4% of the overall CTs
- Direct communication between patients and health professionals (HP) triggered 4.1 CTs/patient/months (fig. 4)
- About missing interaction between THCB and patient >3 days
- Non-use of the smartphone for a longer period
- Abroad on Holidays or no internet access

Conclusion

High compliance with the app services over half a year may be explained by

- the rewarding game system and low threshold of communication with health professionals,
- the peer character of the THCB and
- the perceived usefulness of the THCB integrated in the personalized smartphone, a familiar medium for adolescents.
- Further analyses will explore, whether THCB usage is associated with positive health effects.

References


Katrin Heldt, Dirk Büchter, Bjørn Brogle, Chen-Hsuan Iris Shih, Dominik Rüegger, Andreas Filler, Pauline Gindrat, Dominique Durrer, Nathalie Farfoun-Lambert, Tobias Kowatsch Dagmar l’Allemand

Children’s Hospital of Eastern Switzerland, Claudiastrasse 6, 9006 St. Gallen, katrin.heldt@kispisg.ch