Large-scale roll out of online prospective measurement of mood symptoms in affective disorders

Knott S1, Gordon-Smith K2, Forty L1, Craddock N3, Hinds C1, Wadlekar A1, Bilderbeck A1, Saunders KEA1, Harrison RP1, Goodwin GM1, Geddes JR2, Jones F1, Jones L1
1 Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Worcester, UK
2 Division of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences, Cardiff University, UK
3 Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, UK

Introduction

True Colours is an online prospective mood-monitoring system developed at the University of Oxford to assist local patients and clinicians with monitoring course of illness in bipolar disorder. Initial evidence suggests the clinical utility of prospective mood monitoring in improving our understanding of the course of illness in bipolar disorder. The current study offers the first large scale prospective measurement of mood symptoms in individuals with affective disorders. Here we report our initial experiences of using True Colours for research purposes in the Bipolar Disorder Research Network (BDRN), a large, well-characterised research network of individuals with mood disorders spread throughout the UK.

Methods

Initially, a subset of BDRN participants (n=34) were invited to take part in a pilot study and to ensure the practicality / acceptability of using True Colours within BDRN. 22 individuals took part in the pilot and feedback was received from 11 participants. Participants commented on the ease of use and convenience of True Colours as well as the potential clinical utility of the graphical representation of weekly mood scores.

All BDRN participants (n=7000) were invited to participate in weekly True Colours ratings via three postal invitations sent over an 8-month period. Weekly ratings involve completion of the Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptomatology (QIDS) (Rush et al. 2003) and the Altman Self-Rating Mania Scale (AMS) (Altman et al. 1997). An example of a True Colours graph tracking an individual’s mood symptoms over time is displayed in Figure 1.

Participants also have the additional option to add personalised weekly and daily questions, to allow them to monitor individualised key mood symptoms, early warning signs or mood-monitoring techniques, such as monitoring sleep patterns i.e. ‘During the past week, for how many hours did I typically sleep each day?’

Figure 1. Example of a True Colours graph tracking an individual’s mood symptoms over time

Conclusions

We have demonstrated that large-scale prospective mood monitoring for research purposes using a contemporary online approach is feasible. Positive feedback received from participants and high rates of overall compliance with weekly mood ratings are encouraging.

Challenges have included:
- Variation in participants’ technological ability;
- Management of requests for clinical advice based on mood scores within a research setting;
- Resources required to promote and provide access to the mood monitoring system, as well as resources to provide on-going support for participants using True Colours;
- Not all participants who expressed an interest in joining True Colours had access to internet or email facilities, suggesting that such a contemporary approach of mood monitoring may exclude some individuals.

We are continuing to expand recruitment to True Colours within BDRN, and are currently implementing the next phase of recruitment involving email invitations.

Acknowledgments

We would like to say thank you to all of the individuals who have so generously given their time to participate in BDRN and True Colours.