

Beyond Brick and Mortar: Leveraging Technology to Expand the Reach and Scope of Mental Health Care—and Student Education

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Mental illness imposes a staggering public health burden in the United States and worldwide. Although we have witnessed tremendous advances in the identification of supported psychological treatments, current mental health service delivery models fail to reach adequate numbers of affected individuals. Systematic barriers interfere with the timely provision of needed care for affected individuals, and gaps persist between treatment in research settings and services broadly available in the community.

Technological innovations offer extraordinarily promising vehicles for overcoming traditional barriers to quality mental health care. In recent years, rapidly developing computer and mobile technologies, the broadening availability of the Internet, and increasingly sophisticated capacities for live broadcasting via affordable webcams and mobile devices are transforming many aspects of our daily lives—changing how we work, learn, and communicate. And these innovations are already beginning to transform mental health care delivery.

Technology-based, technology-assisted, and technology-augmented treatment methods are indeed the next frontier in extending the scope and reach of mental

health care, given their power to: (a) liberate treatment from geographical confines; (b) extend client engagement with treatment content and skill rehearsal beyond face-to-face sessions; (c) overcome transportation and other logistical obstacles; (e) expand the ecological validity and generalizability of services by delivering treatment to clients in their natural settings; (f) reduce and streamline tasks outside of direct service provision; (g) increase the cost effectiveness of care; and (h) address person-power issues in clinical psychology by extending the reach of the existing mental health workforce to larger populations of individuals in need.

This presentation will provide a systematic overview of the origins and current state-of-the-evidence on mHealth, telemental health, and related technology-based mental health care strategies. Much of the talk will focus on expansive opportunities, as well as key cautions and limitations. The presentation will then shift to also address how these very same technology-based delivery methods can also be applied to expand the scope and reach of quality education in psychology.