

**YOUR RESOURCE FOR
EMPLOYEES STRUGGLING
WITH SUBSTANCE USE.**

In-network with all major insurance providers.



Hazelden Betty Ford
Foundation

REACH OUT TODAY.

LOGOFF

ACCOUNT

VIEW CART



SITE MENU

Relevant EAP Apps: This Year's Top 10 List

By Kathleen Greer

For the past three years, KGA, a New England-based EAP provider has tested and released an annual list of "Top 10 Well-being Apps." Although initially designed to put the right app in the hands of EA counselors, KGA's app project has proven to be an effective way to build awareness of EAP services and improve engagement.

EAP Options Abound

Overall app usage is rapidly expanding across the globe with an estimated mobile app market reaching \$189 billion by 2020. A total of 259,000 mobile health apps were produced in 2016 (Sarasohn-Kahn, 2016). Clinical health apps are also increasing in numbers, although some app companies have folded due to the financial pressures of performing scientifically valid clinical trials.

Such rapid growth has made the selection of which apps to recommend confusing. Paid apps are losing in popularity but still have value to EAPs, particularly when they are proven to be effective. However, overall, trends are showing that the app market will continue to generate increasing revenue in the foreseeable future (Golmack, 2017).

250 Apps Evaluated

KGA wanted to reach out to their covered lives through a proactive health promotion program to identify apps that could complement KGA's high-touch EAP product. Leadership also wanted to ensure that counselors were recommending high-quality downloads. All of the 250 behavioral health apps evaluated and recommended are available on iOS and Android. KGA focused their selection process on free or low-cost apps by reviewing customer reviews, ratings, popularity, and history of updates.

Narrowing the List

Various criteria were used to shorten the list to 35 apps that clients could use as an adjunct to counseling. For example, the apps were each tested by counselors and work-life specialists to confirm their reliability, simplicity, and efficiency, as well as their overall aesthetics. They particularly focused on the efficacy of the apps, especially for severe stress, anxiety, and sleep deprivation.

Counselors were asked to comment on the particular apps they tested. Some apps didn't make the cut for clinical reasons. For example, the counselors liked the "7 Minute Workout" app, but found that the photographs of the exercise models showed bodies that were unrealistically perfect, thin, and muscular. Since the "10 Best Apps" list is available to the public, counselors worried that the app would be body-shaming to its users.

The Sleep Time Smart Alarm Clock app was rejected because it was "not easy to use and more frustrating than it's worth." The Suicide Safe app was not selected because it is made for clinical rather than public use. Another food app was rejected because it didn't "offer anything that you couldn't get online."

The Top 10 Behavioral Health Apps for 2017

* Mood Kit – This app offers professional psychology tips and tools for everyday life to help improve mood and overall well-being. Counselor: "The items in Mood Kit are very specific and simple, not overwhelming."

* Happify – Happify is a mental health app that provides effective tools and programming to help take control of emotional well-being. It helps combat stress, anxiety, depression, and constant negative thoughts. Counselor: "I think it creates a positive message of mindfulness and encourages taking a break and checking in with yourself."

* Insight Timer – This app is the most popular free meditation app in the Apple store. It has a timer with a pleasant chime, which can be used for silent or guided meditation. Insight Timer has more than 5,000 guided meditations from some of the world's best meditation teachers. There is also a support group feature for those who want to be part of a meditation community. Counselor: "A great simple app to begin and practice meditation. Offers timed and guided meditation... free, simple, and straightforward."

* Pacifica – This mental wellness app provides users with psychologist-designed tools to address stress, anxiety, and depression based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness meditation, relaxation, and mood/health tracking. It offers a user-friendly way to monitor emotions and can be a great adjunct to counseling or helpful on its own. Counselor: "Pacifica sends you reminders to check in around

mood and anxiety during the craziness of life. It not only allows you to track stress, anxiety, and mood, but also allows you to track exercise and diet.”

* C25K – This app offers a structured plan for new runners to gradually build strength and stamina. C25K is great for those who like a tailored running plan that does not require a personal trainer or running group. Counselor: “I actually started the program last night, and already I feel motivated by it. I was surprised at that and also liked the helpful FAQs.”

* Mind the Bump – This meditation app is perfect to help individuals and couples mentally and emotionally prepare for having a baby and becoming a new parent. Mind the Bump helps users to reconnect with their partner and focus on one’s changing body throughout pregnancy. Counselor: “I really like how this app encourages you to connect with your partner.”

* Fooducate – This weight-loss app is ideal for individuals who want to lose weight with the help of a free coach and a supportive community. Fooducate allows users to track food intake and mood. Counselor: “I particularly liked that they rated many different kinds of foods and their brands. It’s a great way to track calories and get information about various foods.”

* Lumosity – This app improves memory and attention through comprehensive brain training. Lumosity is great to use when you are traveling or have some time to kill, and it helps to strengthen the power of the brain with fun and engaging games. Counselor: “Lumosity is pleasurable and not intimidating. It’s also informative about strengths or weaknesses in learning.”

* Relax and Rest Guided Meditations – This meditation app offers three programs of varying lengths (breath, deep rest, whole body), which allow the listener to relax deeply regardless of how much time the user has to meditate. The calming voice and music can help to put someone with sleeping difficulties into a deep sleep, and help reduce anxiety. Counselor: “I love this app and use it all the time. It has short 6-9 minute meditations that I can quickly do when I get home from a long day at work or right before bed. It helps to relax and center me, which is important after hectic days.”

* Cozi Family Organizer – This family organization app’s features include a shared calendar, shopping lists, and to-do lists that everyone in the family can access on the go. Counselor: “Each family member is color coded so you can easily see where everyone needs to be on that day and at what time. It also emails the weekly schedule on Sunday to all family members.”

App Promotion

The next challenge was to introduce the apps to the employees and family members we serve. The promotion included:

- * introductory letters;
- * 7,000 cards provided to employees at benefit/health fairs; and
- * a social media campaign launched on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Summary

The mobile health app industry continues to grow. When used in combination with EAP counseling, apps can provide both useful information and motivation. "In a way, apps and web pages have replaced our traditional tip sheets," states Kristin Matthews, Clinical Manager at KGA.

How often do counselors and work life specialists actually recommend apps during the initial EAP assessment? "On average, 18% of the time," according to a 2017 KGA survey. "This was a 47% increase over 2016, with 90% of the staff strongly agreeing that it's "easier to recommend apps that have been previously vetted." "This is a fabulous way to reach our younger population," noted one HR client.

Kathleen Greer is founder and chairman of the Framingham, Mass.-based KGA, Inc., which provides EAP services to over 100 organizations. Kathy can be reached at greer@kgreer.com.

References

Golmack, S. (2017, February 20). Current trends and future prospects. Smashing Magazine. Retrieved from <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2017/02/current-trends-future-prospects-mobile-app-market>

Sarasohn-Kahn, J. (2016, October 21). The mobile health app glut [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.healthcareitnews.com/blog/mobile-health-app-glut>

EVENTS