

## Fighting Anxiety and Depression with Digital Therapy



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*Dr Lloyd Humphreys is a clinical psychologist, NHS Innovation Accelerator alumnus and Head of Europe at [SilverCloud Health](#), the leading digital mental and behavioural health platform.*

*Here he explains how digital therapy is providing significant benefit to service users requiring mental health support, and how a successful and continually developing partnership with [Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#) has provided a template for the rest of the NHS.*

As a mode of treatment for the types of anxiety and depression suffered by millions everyday, digital therapy has come of age. It is no longer a question of its effectiveness but more one of: "how can we provide access to the whole population". SilverCloud Health has the largest evidence-base of any digital therapeutic approach and has been shown to improve mental health even after 12 months following discharge.

### A Win-Win Partnership

Recently, when we were marking World Mental Health Day, we reached the milestone of more than 300,000 people suffering mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, being treated through innovative digital therapy programmes developed as a result of an established partnership with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

The collaboration between SilverCloud and the mental health and community trust is now at the heart of the development of a suite of digital programmes accessible by patients online and that has become a template for digital health delivery for the NHS in England. The initiative has proved to be a clinical success, saving on resource – four to six times as many people can be supported through SilverCloud digital therapy and with reduced cost – it is proven to be 80% more cost-effective.

Such programmes are now incorporated in more than 75% of NHS IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) services, reflecting Berkshire Healthcare's position as one of a handful of NHS mental health trusts deemed as a 'Global Digital Exemplar' by NHS England for transforming patient care and engagement through technology.

Separate figures show that as at October 2019, more than 1.1 million hours of digital therapy have been delivered through SilverCloud digital therapy programmes, with over 65% of people benefitting from clinically significant improvement, against an NHS IAPT recovery target of 50%.

### The Story of Estelle

The experiences of a service user, Estelle, illustrate the lasting impact such therapeutic approaches can have. It was the Christmas holiday in 2015 when the mother-of-two realised something was not right. Looking forward to relaxing and recharging over the break she found frustratingly that she was not able to sleep. She had recently been suffering aches and pains, but her sleeplessness had developed out of the blue.

Two months later Estelle, at the time a senior manager in a high profile FTSE100 company, went to work and 'hit the wall'.

As she explains in her own words: "I opened my email inbox and thought 'I can't process any of this'." Eventually, she was off work for eight months as she recovered from acute stress.

Through her GP, she was put in touch with the Talking Therapies service at Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and as part of her treatment she was then given access to SilverCloud digital therapy.

The programme Estelle participated in contains tools and content modules that include techniques on how to get motivated during periods of low mood, how to challenge negative thoughts and how to manage worry.

She was nervous initially of being treated through an online service, but now says: "I was blown away by it, it was very user-friendly, providing bite-size chunks of information and the tone was not at all patronising. I liked the fact that I could dip in and out of a module and revisit if necessary.

"It offered a flexible approach and I could use the SilverCloud Health service on a mobile and listen to it while sitting in a cafe or by a river. I found the modules extremely easy, discreet and handy to use and there was no need to travel to or attend a face-to-face session."

### **Paracetamol for Mental Health**

Estelle returned to the SilverCloud Health programmes for a period in 2018 when she faced a sudden cluster of stressful events, including changing jobs, moving house and the loss of a very close relative.

She believes free online therapy should be available to everyone "so that issues can be nipped in the bud, rather than people getting to the stage where they are being pulled back from more serious illness. If you have a scratchy throat, you can buy paracetamol tablets very cheaply in a supermarket. Why isn't there the same easy availability for help for common mental health issues?"

Given the overwhelming evidence of the success of such an approach, our aim is to make digital therapy programmes available to people across the UK, so that others like Estelle get the support they need in meeting their everyday challenges.

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