



Healios

Healios carry out review of digital tools available in autism diagnostic process and reflects on current innovations efforts in the sector

One of the UK's leading digital providers of specialist autism, ADHD and mental health services has published a new scoping review into available mobile diagnostic apps for autism - which offers an important reflection on innovation trends in the field as a whole.

Healios works in partnership with the NHS, offering pioneering solutions to the growing demands in autism and ADHD care.

Since it was founded a decade ago, it has enabled tens of thousands of children, adults and their families to access life-changing support from the comfort of their own homes utilising its bespoke virtual platform, Panacea, helping to reduce waiting times and improve outcomes.

Its science, product and tech team have now published their latest work, which reviews and synthesises the existing evidence about currently available digital biomarker tools for autism that are accessible through a mobile phone.

Sonia Ponzo, VP of Science at Healios, explained what the review covers and why her team wanted to take a look at what is on offer.

She said: "One of the strengths of the digital health field is also one of its greatest weaknesses - its pace. It's really hard to keep up with all the different products developed and marketed; we rarely as a field stop to reflect on what has been done and how we can digest the information we have. This wealth of choice also means lack of direction and clarity for clinicians, researchers and end users.

"So we thought it would be really useful to take a moment to look at what the market currently offers when it comes to diagnostics for autism and provide people with a clear summary of the evidence generated to date."

Sonia explained that as one of the biggest providers of digital autism assessments in the UK and a respected voice in the autism field, Healios has a responsibility to make sure it paves the way when it comes to leveraging technology to solve deeply rooted and often overlooked user pain points.

She said: "We have a lot to say, a lot of data and a wealth of experience within Healios so we should be leveraging that to improve lives and the position of people who are currently on waiting lists for a diagnosis. That's what this scoping review is all about for us really.

“We know from our current service and the field at large what the struggles are, we know that the waiting lists are ever growing so we know that there is a need for the end users themselves to have answers and to have resources as soon as possible.

“We also know that there is a gap in the provisioning of post-diagnostic support and a lack of clarity in terms of available therapeutic pathways.

“Technology can really help close this gap. It also has the advantage of reducing barriers to entry for those who need it the most. Most families own a smartphone - the easier we can make it for them to access the support they need in a timely way, the better.”

The review looked at tools that are mobile first, so mobile phones or tablets, to emphasise the need for products that really can be accessed by anyone.

Data on the accuracy and validity of four digital biomarker tools aimed at aiding the diagnosis of autism - one commercial and three research - was reported in the review.

Sonia admitted the dearth of such tools was surprising and also spoke about some of the other key highlights of the review.

She said: “Among the four we reviewed we found there is high variability in terms of the way they have been tested and developed - as well as in the way that data has been reported, with lots of blanks left for users to fill.

“We also observed a lack of diversity in studies evaluating these digital tools, especially when it comes to gender and ethnicity. Validating products in diverse populations is important to ensure results can be generalised and that tools are accurate for as many people as possible.

“These things combined make it difficult for people to understand what the value is of these products. There needs to be a more standardised approach in conducting and reporting these studies so that they can be compared across different organisations, research or industry.

“Companies like Healios have a duty to their users - to be transparent, clear and to provide them with services and tools that really respond to their needs. Our innovation efforts embody these values.

“We have listened to users’ pain points and we are building technologies that will assist clinicians in their diagnostic process - and beyond. We want to offer complementary tools that can reduce wait times and misdiagnoses - and we want to do so by collecting information clinicians would not otherwise be exposed to through mobile devices.

“We’re excited about the possibilities our innovation efforts will bring and look forward to sharing more information soon.”

The full scoping review can be found at <https://mhealth.jmir.org/2023/1/e52377>.

Anyone working for a local service and wanting to learn more about Healios' pathway can visit <https://contact.healios.org.uk/neurodevelopmental-care>

ENDS

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For information, contact James Brindle, External PR Officer on 07761 055903 or email james.brindle@healios.org.uk

Notes to editors

About Healios

Healios is the UK's leading digital provider of specialist autism, ADHD and mental health services for children and adults. Healios is reimagining the care experience by optimally combining an expert multidisciplinary care team with evidence-based, family-centred approaches and great technology.

Healios uses its purpose-built virtual care platform, Panacea, to connect families with their team of expert clinicians. So far, Healios has delivered over 200,000 clinical sessions and accepted over 50,000 referrals from the NHS.

At Healios, we work proudly in partnership with over 60% of England's NHS mental health local services and health boards in England and Wales and over 50% of mainland Health Boards in Scotland, to increase capacity and reduce wait times for local services.

Over 80% of our NHS customers recognise the value we add to their service and have long term partnerships with us. And most importantly, our services are making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people and their families, with a resounding 91% recommending Healios.

Our neurodiversity services include; autism assessments, ADHD assessments, dual autism and ADHD assessments, post-diagnosis support for family and adapted interventions to support co-existing mental health difficulties.

To learn more about Healios, visit healios.org.uk or email commercial@healios.org.uk