

## App Helps Reduce Suicidal Thoughts in Stressed Interns



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New doctors working round the clock during their internship experience a predictable sharp rise in stress and pressure, which often leads to depression and suicidal thoughts. Now a new study published in *JAMA Psychiatry* shows that an online tool to support their mental health may cut the rate of suicidal thoughts in half.

[MoodGYM](#) — a free web-based cognitive behavioural therapy or wCBT tool — offers a digital, streamlined form of the "talk therapy" that mental health professionals provide in office visits. The findings suggest that such a tool could help others in high-stress, high-pressure positions.

Medical interns and others can use such web-based tools to help themselves, according to the research team led by psychiatrists at the University of Michigan and the Medical University of South Carolina who have studied depression and suicide amongst medical students and young doctors for years.

"This is a relatively risk-free intervention to help interns recognise and treat depression," says Srijan Sen, MD, PhD, senior author of the new study and a U-M Medical School faculty member. "This is the first study to show that wCBT can reduce suicidal ideation, or suicidal thoughts, in training doctors."

Medical interns make an ideal population to study wCBT's effects, Dr. Sen says, because their stress level changes almost overnight and remains high for an entire year. Moreover, this type of intervention is well-suited to this population because "the majority of interns won't seek traditional mental health treatment, mainly because they lack the time, don't have convenient access to care or have concerns about confidentiality," adds the study's first author Connie Guille, MD, of MUSC.

Dr. Sen and co-authors tested the app on 199 interns, who all volunteered to take part in the study. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to use the wCBT tool. The other half (control group) got general information on depression and suicide, and contact information for mental health professionals.

The results show that one in five of the control group thought about suicide sometime in their internship year -- compared with one in eight of those who used the MoodGYM. Most of those assigned to use the wCBT tool stuck with it, using it all year, according to the researchers.

Given the encouraging results of the wCBT test, Dr. Sen's team plans to develop an app designed specifically for medical trainees. It will focus on specific situations and stresses new doctors encounter. They are not affiliated with MoodGYM's developers, from the National Institute for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University.

Source: [University of Michigan Health System](#)

Image credit: Australia National University

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