

Short-term psychotherapy is a cost-beneficial care for common mental health problems

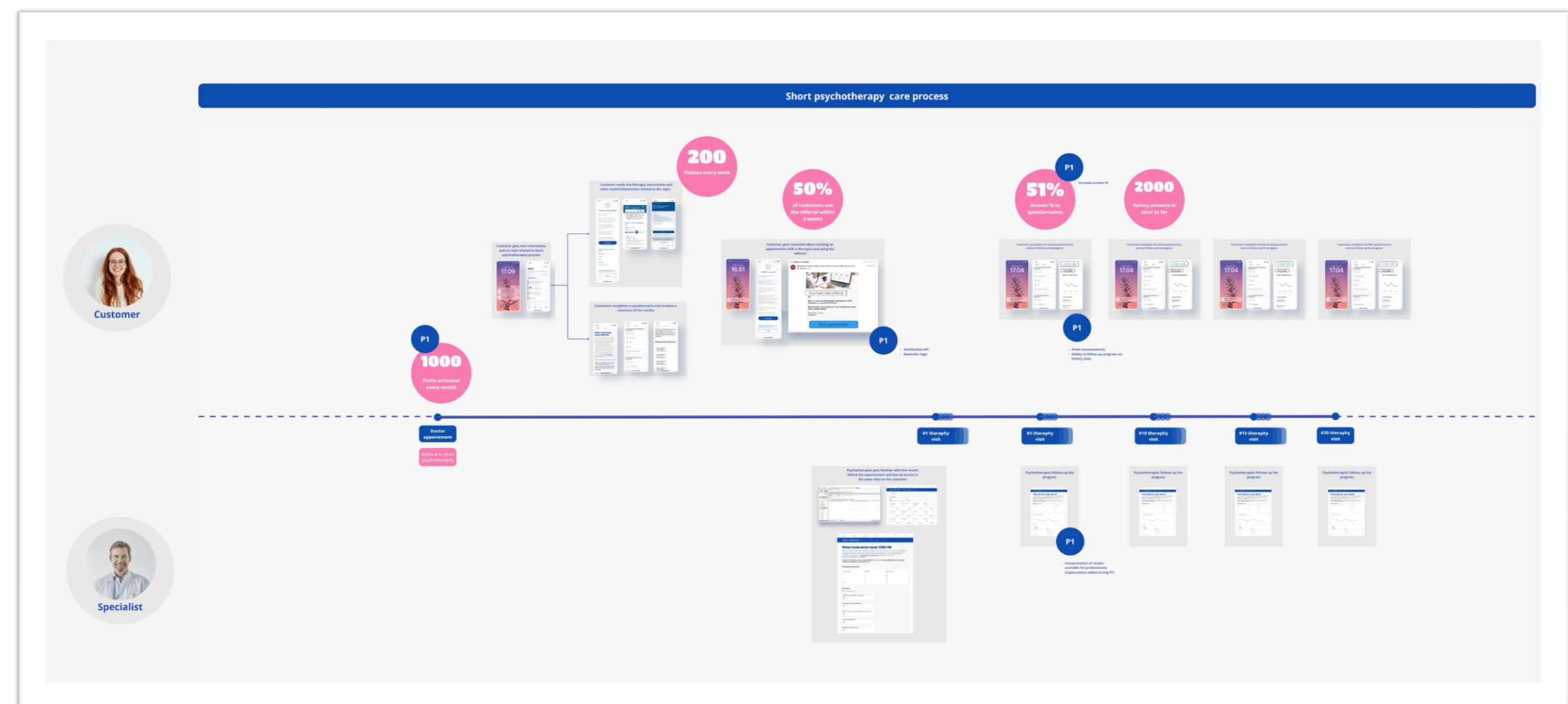
Antti-Jussi Ämmälä, Tuija Turunen, Maaret Helintö, Sami Leppämäki, Ara Taalas, Maija Savolainen-Koskinen, Lotta Walden, Oskar Niemenoja, Jukka Pitkänen and Simo Taimela

Introduction

The burden of mental ill-health has increased significantly worldwide. Most mental health problems are treatable with psychotherapy.

Clinical outcomes can be monitored regularly with adequate Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs), which are shared between both the patient and the professional to steer the process. Using this information makes it possible to obtain substantial improvements both in clinical and real-life settings, such as reduced sickness absence days (SA).

Figure 1: Patient and professional view to psychotherapy path



Material and methods

The setting was the largest private healthcare provider in Finland, Terveystalo, with more than 360 outpatient centers through Finland.

We built a digital care path for short term psychotherapy, where PROMs are used to steer the therapy process (Fig1). We collected data from 9 109 individual patients between 2015 and 2022 (Table1). We used the number of SA days as the indicator of functioning.

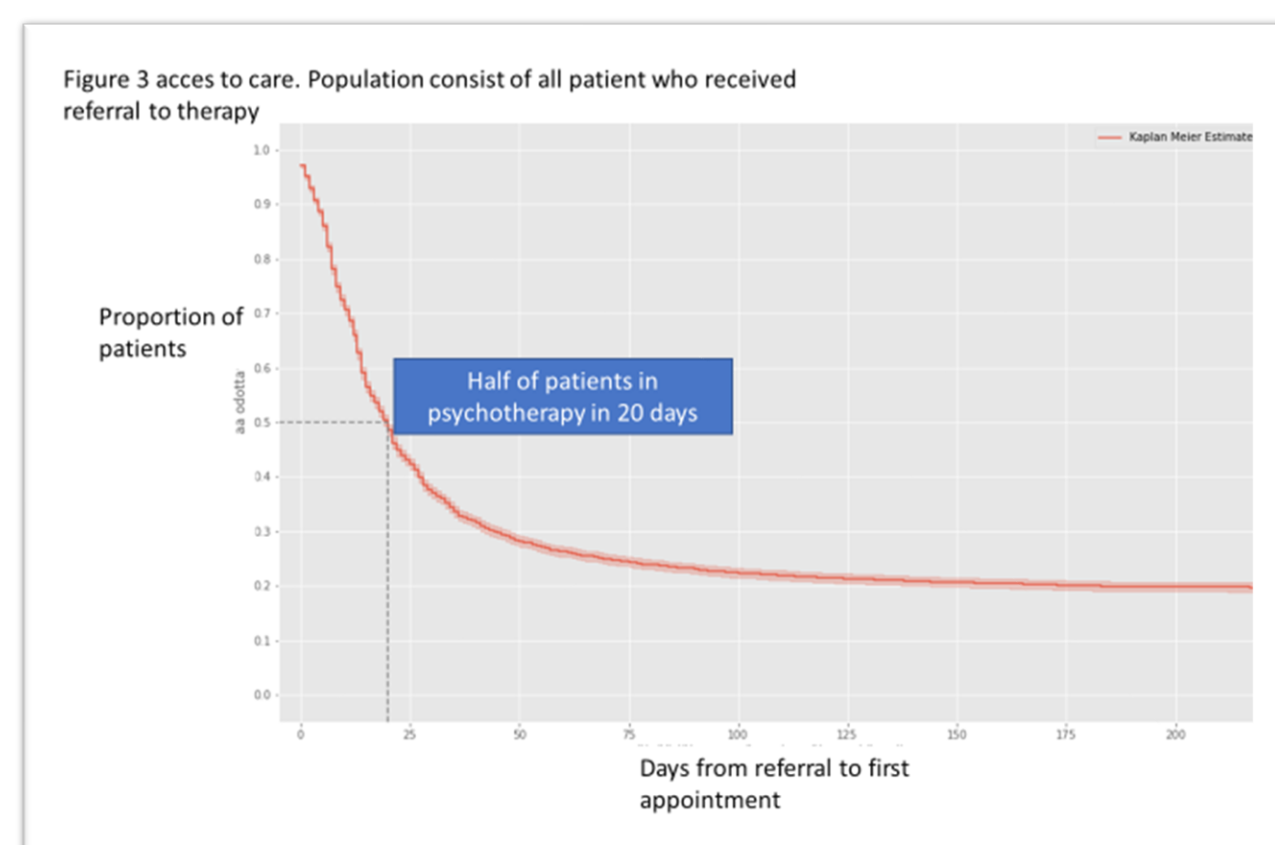
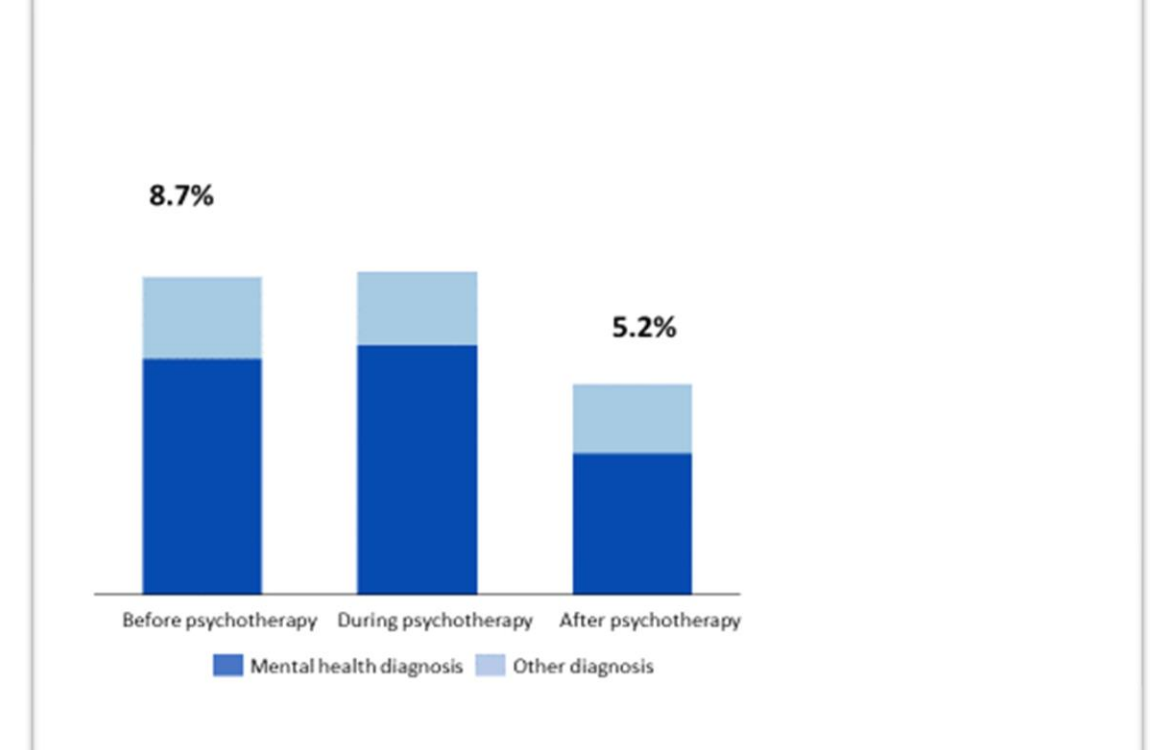
Characteristic	Value
Individuals	9109 (men 2921, 32%)
Mean age	39.6 yrs
Referring physicians	517
Treatment episodes	9627
Visits	72296

We included all SA days, for any reason, including also self-reported absences. SA data was collected six months before therapy, during therapy, and six months after therapy.

Results

Sickness absence days due to mental health diagnoses were clearly lower after therapy (Fig.2). The delay from referral to first appointment was short (fig.3)

Figure 2. Sickness absence days before and after brief psychotherapy. A total reduction of 40% in absence days due to mental health 6 months after therapy.



The cost of an average therapy episode was 1064€. The estimated expense of sick leave day for the employer is 370€/day, and the six months return of investment is 2.4, showing that psychotherapy was very cost-beneficial.

Conclusions

Digitally guided psychotherapy is an effective and cost-beneficial way of treating common mental health problems. It reduces SA days for both mental health related diagnoses and other causes.

