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Mental health app supports university students

Pilot study of app with user-centered design shows promise as mental health support tool

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of mental health, only a fraction of university students and other young people with a mental disorder receive mental health care.

To address this gap and better support university students' mental health, Kyushu University researchers independently developed a smartphone app called the 'Mental App' through a unique collaborative effort combining psychiatry and arts and design studies.

Designed for university students according to the results obtained from a questionnaire, the app aims to raise awareness of mental condition and support services by putting self-monitoring and self-screening tools and mental health resources in a location that is nearly always at hand for current students—their smartphone.

In the app, users record factors such as appetite, exercise, sleep, and mood on a calendar and can use a self-screening function for identifying 14 mental disorders.

According to the results, the app provides advice and resources, such as contact information of clinics and public consulting services and links to the campus clinic and self-care websites.

Studying the effect of the app on the mental health of students who used it for two weeks, the researchers found that app usage improved the students' performance on a mental health scale known as the GHQ-12 score.

Furthermore, most users gave the app a good evaluation, with 92.8% of users being "slightly satisfied" or "satisfied" with the overall design of the app and 85.7% expressing similar levels of satisfaction with the app's operability.

"With the challenges posed by COVID-19, student's mental health has become an even larger concern," says Kosuke Kajitani, associate professor at Kyushu University's Center for Health Sciences and Counseling and first author on the paper reporting the research.

"Through continued development of this app, we hope to expand use at Kyushu University and eventually branch out to other universities."

For more information about this research, see "Short-term effect of a smartphone application on the mental health of university students: A pilot study using a user-centered design self-monitoring application for mental health," Kosuke Kajitani, Ikumi Higashijima,
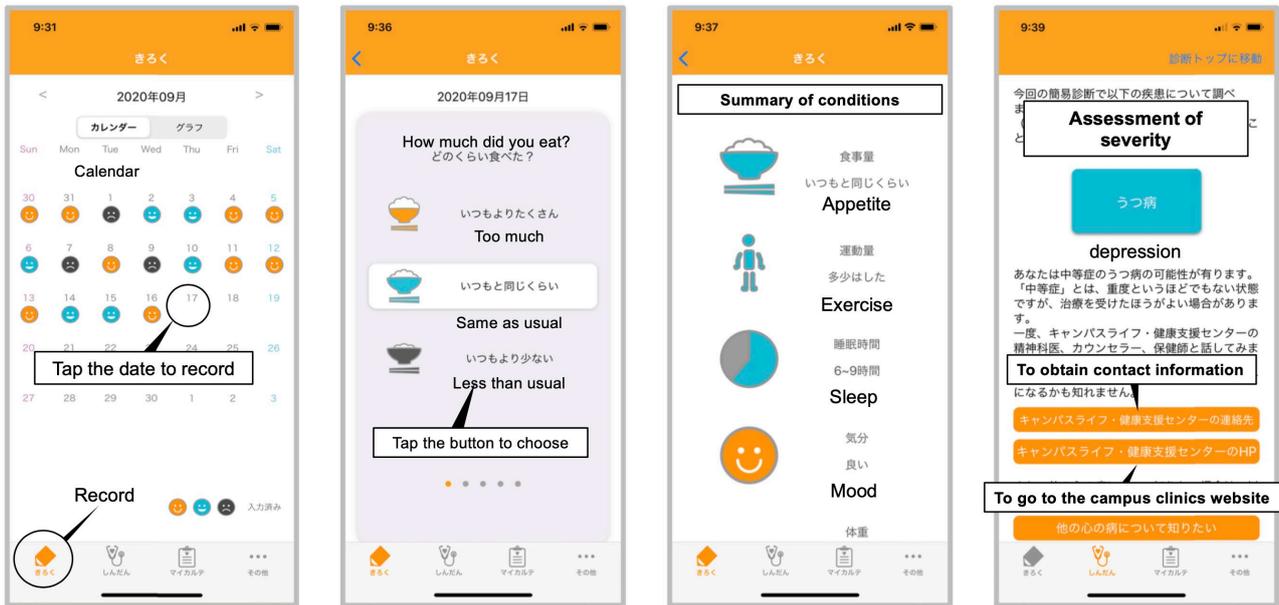
Mental App provides a calendar system for record daily conditions, self-screening functions, and related mental health advice and information.

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