

Can an app a day, keep the doctor at bay?

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### Background

Accessibility and popularity of smartphone health apps present a potential to prescribe them as non-drug interventions in general practice.

### Objectives

To test the feasibility of app prescription, and to evaluate the effectiveness of two behavioral interventions to increase uptake of app prescription in general practice.

### Method

We used a single group before-and-after paired design. Prescription pads for 6 apps with numbered pages and 2-minute videos demonstrating their workings were developed as interventions. GPs reported numbers dispensed at each month for 4 months. After second month's reporting, one randomly chosen video was sent. GPs' app use and confidence level were measured before and after the study.

### Results

Of 40 GPs recruited, 36 completed the study (median age 40, years in practice 8.5, work 4ds/wk). In total 1,323 app prescriptions were dispensed over 4 months. ITT analysis of apps prescribed per GP over 4 months were median of 33 [0-111]. Average apps prescribed per GP per week increased from 2.5 pre-study to 9 post-study. Confidence about prescribing apps doubled from average of 2/5 (not so confident) to 4 (very confident). App videos did not significantly affect the prescription rates. Post study interviews revealed that the best features of the interventions were the visual cue aspect and the tangibility of the prescription pads to give to patients.

### Conclusions

The concept of app prescription is feasible. Our intervention prescription pads were effective. However, the absence of a repository of effective apps for ongoing use by GPs remains a challenge.