

Group Visits Improve Symptoms and Lower Utilization in Primary Care Patients with Anxiety

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Context

Patients with anxiety have higher utilization of primary care, some of which is potentially avoidable. Treating anxiety may be an effective method of reducing unnecessary utilization

Shift is a 4-week program for people with stress and/or anxiety. It consists of weekly 90 minute group sessions jointly led by a clinician and a health coach. It follows a skills-based approach based on concepts of mindfulness, cognitive-behavior therapy, and yoga.

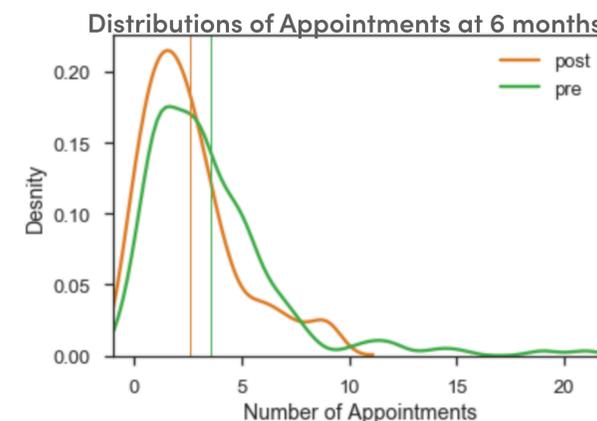
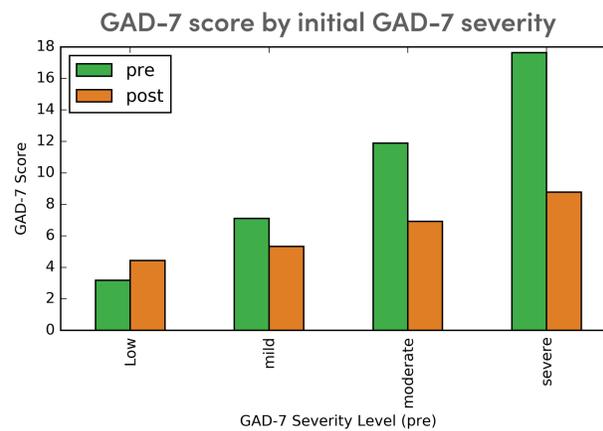
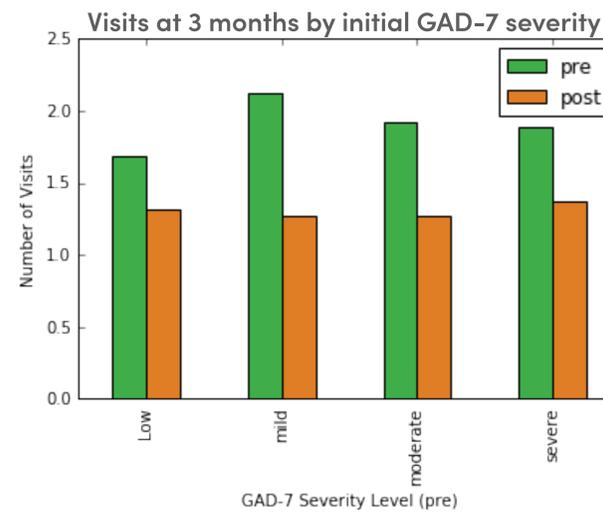
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| Week 1 | Mountain Pose; Cleansing Breaths; Soft-Belly Breathing |
| Week 2 | Lovingkindness (Metta) Meditation; Healthy Self-Talk |
| Week 3 | Progressive Muscle Relaxation/ Body Awareness |
| Week 4 | Mindfulness |

Objective

Evaluate the effect of a group visit program for primary care patients with anxiety or stress on change in symptoms and health-care utilization.

Study Design

- Cohort Design
- **Setting:** Large, primary care practice with multiple offices in the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, and Washington DC
- **Patients:** 541 adults with anxiety and/or stress, self-referred or referred by their Primary Care Provider.
- **Analysis:** paired t-tests
- **Main Outcome Measure:** Average number of primary care visits for any reasons.
- **Secondary Outcome Measure:** Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) scores



Results

Care Utilization

- Visits per 100 patients, per month dropped from 70 to 46 in three month follow-up period ($p < 0.0001$).
- Visits per 100 patients, per month dropped from 59 to 43 in six month follow-up period ($p < 0.01$).
- Among patients with more than 10 visits in the prior six months, visit rates dropped to population's average.
- Referrals dropped from 17 to 10 per 100 patients per month ($p < 0.01$).
- No change was seen in telemedicine encounters (1.06 versus 2.35 per 100 patients per month).

Clinical Outcomes

- Median decrease in GAD-7 scores of 4 points (43%) ($p < 0.0001$).
- 63% of patients dropped at least one severity level ($p < 0.0001$).
- Percent of patients with a GAD-7 score indicative of mild or below anxiety increased from 37% to 78% ($p < 0.0001$).
- 64% of patients with severe anxiety improved to mild or below ($p < 0.0001$).

Conclusions

Teaching stress management and coping skills appears to reduce health care utilization, while reducing anxiety symptoms.