

# Effectiveness of Prompt Mental Health Care: Preliminary results from a randomized controlled trial

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## Background:

Prompt Mental Health Care (PMHC) service is a Norwegian initiative, adapted from the English 'Improved Access to Psychological Therapy' (IAPT), aimed at improving access to primary care treatment for anxiety and depression. Thus far, both PMHC and IAPT have been evaluated by cohort studies only. Albeit yielding promising results, the extent to which these are attributable to the treatment thus remains unsettled. This study investigates the effectiveness of PMHC compared to treatment as usual (TAU) at six months follow-up.

## Methods:

Randomized controlled trial with parallel assignment in two PMHC sites from November 2015 to March 2018. Participants were 681 adults (aged  $\geq 18$  years) considered for admission to PMHC due to anxiety and/or mild to moderate depression. These were randomly assigned on a 70:30 ratio. Main outcomes were recovery rates and changes in symptoms of depression and anxiety between baseline and follow-up. Primary outcome data were available for 73%/67% in the PMHC/TAU group. Sensitivity analyses based on observed patterns of missingness were conducted.

## Results:

A reliable recovery rate of 58.5% was observed in the PMHC group and 31.9% in the TAU group, yielding a between-group effect size (ES) of 0.61 [95% CI 0.37-0.85,  $p < .001$ ]. The differences in degree of improvement between PMHC and TAU yielded an ES of -0.88 [95% CI -1.23-0.43,  $p < 0.001$ ] for symptoms of depression and -0.60 [95% CI -0.90-0.30,  $p < 0.001$ ] for symptoms of anxiety in favour of PMHC. All sensitivity analyses pointed in the same direction with small variations in point estimates. Findings were slightly more robust for depressive than anxiety symptoms.

## Conclusions:

The PMHC treatment was substantially more effective than TAU in alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression. This adaptation of IAPT is considered a viable supplement to existing health services to increase access of effective treatment for adults who suffer from anxiety and mild to moderate depression.

## Key messages:

- This study is the first to evaluate the effectiveness of an IAPT-like treatment model in terms of a randomized controlled trial.

- Prompt Mental Health Care was substantially more effective than TAU in alleviating symptoms of depression and anxiety at 6-months follow-up.