



# Mental Health on the Threshold of Digitalization: An Opportunity and a Challenge for Experts

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**Keywords:** Mental Health, Medical consultations, COVID-19, Healthcare services, Digital technologies, Digital infrastructure.

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Cite as: Theofilou P. Mental Health on the Threshold of Digitalization: An Opportunity and a Challenge for Experts. Open Public Health J, 2025; 18: e18749445384468. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2174/0118749445384468250310043828>



Received: January 09, 2025  
Revised: February 12, 2025  
Accepted: February 19, 2025  
Published: March 24, 2025



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Every day, doctors and patients are confronted with digitalization issues related to the health sector, including virtual prescriptions, telemedicine, medical consultations via videoconference, applications on “smart” telephone devices, digital patient files, hospital wards equipped with multimedia systems, and home intercom devices for patients and caregivers. Digitalization heralds the advancement in healthcare and the recovery of the human aspect of doctors, which they lost due to the pressure of resource management in healthcare.

Developments in the sector are largely determined by the changing needs, behaviors, and habits of patients, who are increasingly involved in the management of their health. New technologies that are being implemented in the health sector increase the capabilities and quality of services offered while also increasing the demands of patients, a phenomenon that is more pronounced in the so-called new generations.

Improving mental health is a social and economic imperative for the EU and its member states, which has become clearer after the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health is a prerequisite for health, well-being, and prosperity at a personal and societal level. In this field, the pandemic acted as a catalyst, highlighting the complexity of mental health problems and the difficulty of managing them.

Nearly 1 in 7 people suffer from a mental illness [1], a

leading cause of disability worldwide [2]. However, 75% of people with mental illness do not receive any treatment [3], highlighting the problem of access to mental health care, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19.

With mental health set to cost the global economy \$16 trillion by 2030 [4] and this cost set to continue to rise, there is an urgent need for solutions designed to address these issues in a scalable and cost-effective way.

A major study by Elsevier Health [5], involving over 2800 clinicians and nurses from 111 different professional settings, found that the digital age has now reached the doorstep of healthcare. In this study, 67% of clinicians acknowledged the substantially greater significance of their technological training compared to a decade ago. Encouragingly, this study reported that COVID-19 has particularly highlighted the importance of remote solutions while making patients feel more familiar with remote monitoring platforms. Thus, according to the Elsevier Health survey, more than half of clinicians (56%) state that patients have gained a better ability to manage their own conditions, and a significant proportion of clinicians (62%) expect a change in their role that will allow them to collaborate with patients. The survey highlights the experts’ belief that the use of digital technology can contribute to addressing the issues raised by the World Health Organization. In particular, the use of digital solutions for remote monitoring and assessment of

patients' health could improve access and speed of care, and real-time analysis of patient data could enable personalized treatment and improved quality of care [5].

Importantly, healthcare professionals believe that digital technologies and remote monitoring tools could be beneficial in designing solutions that focus on user needs. These solutions should be continuously evaluated by specialists for their ability to provide value in patient monitoring and treatment. In a study, 67% of clinicians recognized the significantly increasing importance of their technological training compared to 10 years ago. At the same time, 88% of mental health specialists recognized that they do not have the necessary technological training to meet the demands of the upcoming digitalization of healthcare services.

Therefore, an important focus is to provide training to clinicians and establish confidence in their ability to use digital technologies, as these will only be effective in healthcare if mental health professionals are competent in their use.

Finally, the creation of digital infrastructure is a prerequisite for the digitalization of the National Health System. The proposed interventions are related to the creation of appropriate technological infrastructures and the management of patient data, areas on which the interventions are based.

#### **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION**

The author confirms sole responsibility for the

following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Dr. Paraskevi Theofilou is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of the journal *The Open Public Health Journal*.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Declared none.

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