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To cite this article: Debbie Tallon, Carrie-Anne McClay, David Kessler, Glyn Lewis, Tim J. Peters, Roz Shafran, Chris Williams & Nicola Wiles (2019) Materials used to support cognitive behavioural therapy for depression: a survey of therapists' clinical practice and views, *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 48:6, 463-481, DOI: [10.1080/16506073.2018.1541927](https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2018.1541927)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2018.1541927>



Published online: 03 Dec 2018.



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## Materials used to support cognitive behavioural therapy for depression: a survey of therapists' clinical practice and views

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### ABSTRACT

Use of supporting materials in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is widely advocated, and homework increases effectiveness. The study aimed to identify materials most frequently used by CBT therapists to support CBT for depression, and those perceived clinically most effective. Questionnaires were sent to 3665 accredited CBT therapists asking about their use of resources commonly described in CBT manuals, and their views on effectiveness. Of 3665 approached by post/email, 994 (27%) responded. Another 33 completed the questionnaire via the study website. 818/1027 (80%) of respondents were accredited practitioners who deliver one-to-one therapy. Symptom measures, lists of problems/goals, activity schedules, behavioural activation diaries/plans, and case formulation worksheets were used “frequently” or “very frequently” by over 85% of respondents. Sleep diaries and computerised CBT were used least. Most resources were used within and between sessions. Activity schedules, behavioural activation diaries/plans, case formulation worksheets, thought records, and resources to support the identification of conditional beliefs were regarded as most effective. Symptom measures, sleep diaries, and computerised/online materials were considered only moderately effective. Therapists use a wide range of materials to support individual CBT. For delivering CBT, technology-enabled approaches should incorporate a range of materials to enable therapists to tailor treatment effectively.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 May 2018  
Accepted 25 October 2018

### KEYWORDS

Cognitive behavioural therapy; individual CBT; depression; treatment components; attitudes; clinical practice

## Introduction

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for depression (Butler, Chapman, Forman, & Beck, 2006). It is an educational approach and evidence suggests that patients' development and use of cognitive therapy skills predict reduced risk for relapse (Strunk, DeRubeis, Chiu, & Alvarez, 2007). As such, between session tasks

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(“homework”) that allow patients to practise skills learnt during sessions with their therapist are an integral part of therapy (Beck, 2011). There is evidence that the completion of homework outside of the therapy session is associated with better outcomes (Kazantzis, Whittington, & Dattilio, 2010; Mausbach, Moore, Roesch, Cardenas, & Patterson, 2010; Thase & Callan, 2006). Introducing resources such as worksheets and psychoeducational materials to the patient during the therapy session may facilitate the completion of such tasks. However, little is known about the resources that therapists use, both between and within sessions, to support one-to-one CBT for depression.

Previous UK postal surveys of practitioners accredited by the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) (Keeley, Williams, & Shapiro, 2002; MacLeod, Martinez, & Williams, 2008) have focussed on the use of self-help materials and found that most therapists regularly recommended self-help approaches, largely written CBT materials. Therapists viewed these resources as particularly important for increasing client’s understanding of their mental health problems, their sense of control and motivation, for preventing relapse, and reducing the length of time required with a therapist (Keeley et al.). Whilst these self-help materials were viewed positively, they were mainly used as an adjunct to individual therapy rather than as an integral part of CBT (MacLeod et al., 2008).

Advances in technology make it possible to integrate individual, one-to-one CBT (delivered online and/or face-to-face) with linked online elements such as homework tasks. Enabling the discrete completion of homework tasks (e.g. through apps or use of mobile devices) may help remove some of the barriers to completion of homework; for example, the risk of getting “caught” writing down thoughts and feelings on paper; or having to wait until the evening to recall earlier thoughts for homework tasks (Barnes et al., 2013). Moreover, previous research (Barnes et al., 2013) has highlighted that clients report difficulties attending face-to-face sessions because of other commitments, caring responsibilities, and inconvenient appointment times and/or locations. Such issues were common reasons for depressed clients not starting, or for withdrawing from therapy (Barnes et al., 2013). Thus, the development of “technology-enabled” services (Mohr, Weingardt, Reddy, & Schueller, 2017) has the potential to improve access to, and engagement with, therapy and hence improve patient outcomes. However, in order to develop such services, we need to increase our understanding about the resources that are used by therapists providing CBT for people with depression and how effective therapists regard these in improving outcomes for patients.

Collections of online resources which include CBT worksheets and psychoeducational resources are available for therapists to access and use as part of therapy. Examples include GetSelfHelp (<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>), Psychology Tools (<https://www.psychologytools.com/>), and the Centre for Clinical Interventions (<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians>). However, the use of supporting materials is not routinely reported in clinical trials of CBT. Furthermore, there is currently no empirical evidence on which resources therapists use in their day-to-day practice with clients with depression, how they use these tools, or how effective they consider them to be.

Therefore, the aim of our study was to identify materials that are commonly used by CBT therapists to support one-to-one CBT with patients who have depression, and to

identify the materials therapists perceive as most effective in bringing about clinically helpful change.

## Methods

### Design

This cross-sectional questionnaire study is part of a 6-year programme of work funded by the National Institute for Health Research [grant number RP-PG-0514-20012] to develop and evaluate a new intervention for depression that will integrate one-to-one CBT sessions with a therapist (initial appointment face-to-face and subsequently online), with online CBT materials. The intervention will be delivered via a purpose-built, online platform that will include a wide range of high-quality online resources for patients to access as part of their therapy, and functionality to enable therapy sessions to take place remotely.

### Participants

We aimed to survey accredited CBT practitioners in order to inform the development of the online CBT resources. The BABCP (<http://www.babcp.com/>) is the lead body for CBT therapists in the UK. The National Health Service (NHS) has invested in Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services to improve access to psychological therapist for patients in England. CBT therapists working within the NHS IAPT services are required to be accredited by BABCP if they deliver “high-intensity” (one-to-one) therapy. We aimed to specifically target accredited CBT practitioners, across the United Kingdom and Ireland, who deliver “high-intensity” therapy as this represented the group of practitioners who would deliver our new intervention. Respondents were excluded if they were not BABCP accredited, or not working as a “high-intensity” practitioner.

### Procedure

We used three recruitment strategies in order to maximise the number of accredited “high-intensity” CBT practitioners invited:

#### **1. Recruitment via BABCP membership list**

When CBT therapists apply to become a member of the BABCP, they are asked whether their contact details can be passed on to other organisations—for example, those conducting research surveys relating to CBT. At the time of the survey, the BABCP had approximately 4600 accredited practitioners, supervisors, and trainers. Of these, 3665 had consented for their contact details to be used in this way. 2528 (69%) had agreed to be contacted either by post or email, 28 (1%) by post only, and 1109 (31%) by email only.

**Invitations by post.** Questionnaires were mailed out in April 2016 to the 2556 individuals who had consented to being contacted by post, along with a participant information leaflet about the study and a reply-paid envelope. A covering letter also included details of a web-link for therapists to complete the questionnaire online if they

preferred. Completion of the questionnaire was taken as consent to participate. Therapists were given the option of returning the questionnaire blank if they did not want to participate. A reminder letter was sent to non-responders approximately 2 weeks after the initial mail out, and a final reminder sent to non-responders after a further 2 weeks.

**Invitations by email.** Therapists who agreed to being contacted by email only ( $n = 1109$ ) were emailed in April 2016, with an invitation to participate. The email included a web-link to the participant information leaflet, and to the online survey. Therapists were given the option of contacting the research team if they did not want to participate. A reminder email was sent to non-responders 2 weeks after the initial mail out, and a final reminder was sent after a further 2 weeks. All respondents were entered into a draw to win one of 10 £25 gift vouchers as a sign of appreciation for completing the survey.

### **2. Recruitment of IAPT high-intensity CBT therapists via service/clinical leads**

Whilst the BABCP membership list enabled us to contact approximately three quarters of accredited CBT practitioners, we wanted to survey all accredited practitioners and, therefore, used an alternative route to promote the survey in an attempt to capture views from the wider body of practitioners who had opted out of the BABCP mailing list. Thus, we emailed IAPT service/clinical leads to ask for their support in encouraging their high-intensity (specialist) CBT therapists within their service to complete the survey online. We provided service/clinical leads with a web-link directing them to the information leaflet and online questionnaire. One reminder email was sent to service leads 2 weeks later.

### **3. Promotion of the survey through the BABCP member magazine and practitioner workshops/meetings**

To further encourage participation, a brief article was published in the BABCP member magazine (CBT Today) in April 2016 to promote the survey. The article outlined the research planned within the INTERACT programme grant, including the survey. Contact details of the research team, and a web-link to the information leaflet and online survey were included. The survey was also promoted during presentations at the BABCP conferences in April and June 2016, and via the BABCP Twitter feed in May 2016. A web-link to the online survey was included in these promotions.

### **Therapists' questionnaire**

Therapists were asked to provide brief demographic details, and details about their professional background and experience. Therapists were then asked about the materials they used to supplement one-to-one CBT for depression. The materials we listed in the questionnaire were based on those recommended in CBT for depression treatment manuals or that would support key CBT techniques. These were:

- symptom measures such as the Beck Depression Inventory and PHQ-9;
- providing a list of problems and goals;
- resources to support practical problem solving (e.g. a problem list);

- creating a written agenda;
- activity schedules;
- behavioural activation diary or plan;
- written resources to support planned exposure;
- written resources to support behavioural experiments relating to depressive beliefs;
- mood diary;
- thought record (could include the use of “critical voice”/“self-esteem” thought record);
- written/diagrammatic resources to support identification of unhelpful thinking;
- case formulation/case conceptualisation worksheet;
- written/diagrammatic resources to support identification of conditional beliefs/underlying assumptions/“rules for living”;
- relaxation materials (written resources or tapes);
- sleep diary (which relates sleep to mood and activities);
- books/workbooks (e.g. *Mind over Mood*, “*Five Areas Approach*”); and
- computerised CBT and online materials (e.g. “Beating the Blues” or “MoodGYM”).

The therapists were asked to think about their last three clients with depression, and to indicate how often they used the aforementioned materials, and whether the materials were given to clients for use between, or during, the CBT sessions. We did not give specific citations for these materials in our questionnaire, but interested readers can find examples of many of these resources on websites such “Get Self Help” (<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk>), “Centre for Clinical Interventions” (<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au>), and “Psychology Tools” (<https://psychologytools.com>).

Therapists were also asked to list any books, computerised CBT, online, or other materials they used to supplement one-to-one work with their last three clients with depression.

Finally, therapists were asked about their wider experience of using materials to support one-to-one CBT for depression, and to indicate how effective each of the listed materials were in bringing about clinically helpful change, on a scale of 1 (not at all effective) to 9 (very effective).

### **Data analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the information provided by therapists regarding the resources/materials and techniques used to support CBT in terms of the frequency of use of such resources/techniques, whether used within/between sessions and their views on the effectiveness of the various resources.

In order to investigate the association between therapist characteristics (gender, age, professional background, years practicing as a CBT therapist, IAPT work, supervisor work, and work setting) and frequency of use of the 17 resources/techniques, due to sparse data it was necessary to recode frequency into a binary variable (never/rarely/sometimes vs. frequently/very frequently). Subsequently, logistic regression was used to develop a parsimonious model to examine the associations of interest. Therapist characteristics were operationalised as listed in [Table 1](#), with the exception of professional background, which was collapsed into 11 groups due to sparse data. All seven therapist characteristics were included in the initial multivariable model, which was simplified using the likelihood ratio test. All variables at a level of  $p < 0.10$  were retained.

Exploratory analyses were also undertaken to examine the association between therapist characteristics and ratings of effectiveness. Therapist characteristics were operationalised as listed in [Table 1](#). Linear regression models (with effectiveness as a continuous outcome) were developed using the same process as outlined above.

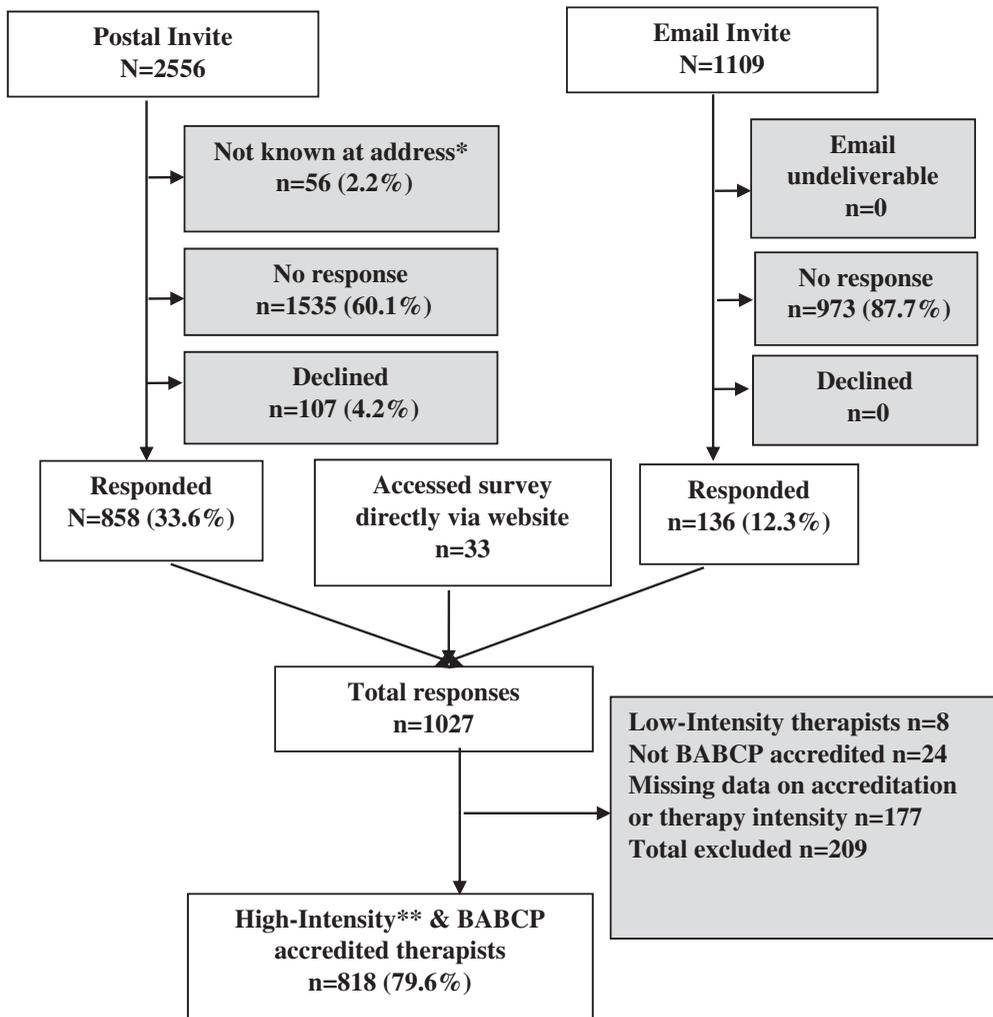
Text responses to the question: “Please list the books and/or the computerised CBT/online materials that you used to supplement your one-to-one work with your last 3 clients with depression” were categorised using an iterative framework approach. First, the data were reviewed by one researcher (C-AM) to identify the most commonly cited, identifiable resources (for example, a specific, named website or book such as the Get Self Help website) and early categories for these data were defined. A second researcher (DT) then reviewed each therapist’s response in detail, and coded it against these existing specific resource categories where possible. Further coding categories were added if more than one person had cited a specific resource, and existing coding was refined as the iterative analysis process continued. For example, broader categories which encompassed a number of related book titles were later sub-divided into more specific categories where a number of the respondents had named a particular book title. If people had listed generic approaches such as “mindfulness” or “Acceptance and Commitment Therapy” (rather than identifying a specific resource), these were coded according to these themes. For example, responses which included “mindfulness” without reference to a particular book or website were categorised as “mindfulness not otherwise specified”. Most of the text data could be categorised, and descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. A third author (NW) reviewed a random sample of 10% of the responses and found only one coding discrepancy, which was resolved through discussion.

Sensitivity analyses were conducted to explore the impact of bias due to non-response. We compared the gender balance of survey respondents with the gender data from the full list of invitees. As further background data were not available for non-responders, we hypothesised that those who responded to later invites may be more similar to non-responders and, therefore, compared the frequency of use of resources for those who responded to the initial invite with responses for those who responded to reminders. We also compared the use of, and views on the effectiveness of, materials to support CBT between those who responded to the initial invite and subsequent reminders. These analyses included people who were invited by post and those invited by email.

## Results

### *Participants*

In total, 3665 accredited BABCP therapists were sent a personally addressed invitation to take part. Of these, 858/2556 (33.6%) responded to the postal invitation and 136/1109 (12.3%) responded to the email invitation ([Figure 1](#)). Thus, the overall response to the email/postal invitations was 27%. A further 33 respondents accessed the survey directly via the study website. Of the 1027 responses received, 209 were excluded as the therapist was not BABCP accredited, and/or was not working as a high-intensity practitioner. Of those excluded, 177 had not provided data on



\*these individuals were subsequently emailed the invite where possible

\*\*deliver High-Intensity Therapy only, or both High and Low-Intensity Therapy

**Figure 1.** Flow diagram of therapist recruitment.

whether they were accredited, or working as a high/low-intensity practitioner. Thus, data provided by 818 high-intensity BABC accredited therapists were included in the analysis.

Characteristics of the respondents are presented in [Table 1](#). The majority of survey participants were female ( $n = 618, 76\%$ ). This was similar to the proportion listed in original BABC mailing list (where gender could be derived from members' titles), 2283/3043 (75%) were female.

The mean age was 46.9 years. Respondents came from a variety of professional backgrounds. Most worked exclusively within the NHS (58%); 27% in both the NHS and private practice. A minority (15%) worked only in private practice. The median

**Table 1.** Characteristics of participants.

| Characteristic  | No. responses | <i>N</i> (%) or Mean ( <i>SD</i> ) |
|---|---------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Gender</b>   | 818           |                                    |
| Male  |               | 200 (24.4)                         |
| Female  |               | 618 (75.6)                         |
| <b>Age (in years)</b>                                     | 812           | 46.9 (10.0)                        |
| <b>Professional background*</b>                           | 816           |                                    |
| Nurse   |               | 273 (33.5)                         |
| Counsellor/Counselling Psychologist                       |               | 135 (16.5)                         |
| CBT Therapist   |               | 120 (14.7)                         |
| Clinical psychologist                                     |               | 75 (9.2)                           |
| Occupational Therapist                                    |               | 54 (6.6)                           |
| Social Worker   |               | 42 (5.2)                           |
| Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner/Mental Health Worker |               | 28 (3.4)                           |
| Psychotherapist   |               | 28 (3.4)                           |
| Psychologist (other)                                      |               | 22 (2.7)                           |
| Psychiatrist  |               | 11 (1.4)                           |
| Other   |               | 28 (3.4)                           |
| <b>Years practicing as CBT therapist</b>                  | 815           | 9.3 (6.1)                          |
| <b>Work within IAPT service</b>                           | 812           |                                    |
| Yes   |               | 505 (62.2)                         |
| No  |               | 307 (37.8)                         |
| <b>Supervisor</b>   | 817           |                                    |
| Yes   |               | 570 (69.9)                         |
| No  |               | 245 (30.1)                         |
| <b>Work setting</b>                                       | 812           |                                    |
| NHS   |               | 470 (57.9)                         |
| Private practice  |               | 122 (15.0)                         |
| Both  |               | 220 (27.1)                         |

\*our questionnaire only included six response options for Professional background (Nurse/Counsellor/Clinical Psychologist/Occupational Therapist/Psychiatrist/Other). However, 320 individuals selected “other” and described their background. These were recoded into new or existing categories where possible.

length of time practising as a CBT therapist was 7 years [IQR 5, 12]. The majority of therapists (70%) worked as supervisors and within IAPT services (62%).

Therapists working in IAPT services were more likely to respond later than those who did not ( $p = 0.007$ ). There was also some weak evidence that NHS employees responded later than private therapists, or those who worked both in the NHS and privately ( $p = 0.056$ ). There was no difference in terms of timing of response by age, gender, professional background, or years practising as a therapist (all  $p > 0.57$ ).

### **Frequency of material use**

Therapists indicated how frequently they used each of 17 materials to support one-to-one CBT with their last three clients with depression (Table 2). Frequency of use varied greatly between the materials listed. Six of the materials were used “frequently” or “very frequently” by 85–90% of respondents. These were: symptom measures (89%), providing lists of problems and goals (85%), activity schedules (85%), behavioural activation diary/plan (85%), and case formulation (85%). The least frequently used were relaxation materials, books/workbooks, sleep diaries, and computerised CBT/online materials. These were used “frequently/very frequently” by 39%, 33%, 22%, and 8% of therapists respectively. Indeed, 53% reported “never” using cCBT or online materials to support CBT, and a further 22% “rarely” used cCBT/online materials.

**Table 2.** Frequency of use of materials to support one-to-one CBT for depression.

| CBT material   | How often did you use these materials? |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
|--|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|--|--|
|  | Never                                  |                       | Rarely                |                       | Sometimes             |                       | Frequently |           | Very frequently |           |  |  |
|  | <i>N</i>                               | <i>n</i> % (95%CI)    | <i>n</i>              | % (95%CI)             | <i>n</i>              | % (95%CI)             | <i>n</i>   | % (95%CI) | <i>n</i>        | % (95%CI) |  |  |
| <b>Materials to support behavioural change</b>   |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Activity schedules   | 811                                    | 4 0.5 (0.1, 1.3)      | 12 1.5 (0.8, 2.6)     | 107 13.2 (10.9, 15.7) | 299 36.9 (33.5, 40.3) | 389 48.0 (44.5, 51.5) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Behavioural activation diary/plan  | 796                                    | 9 1.1 (0.5, 2.1)      | 14 1.8 (1.0, 2.9)     | 94 11.8 (9.6, 14.3)   | 293 36.8 (33.5, 40.3) | 386 48.5 (45.0, 52.0) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Written resources to support planned exposure  | 813                                    | 44 5.4 (4.0, 7.2)     | 86 10.6 (8.5, 12.9)   | 229 28.2 (25.1, 31.4) | 253 31.1 (27.9, 34.4) | 201 24.7 (21.8, 27.8) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Behavioural experiments relating to depressive beliefs   | 809                                    | 40 4.9 (3.6, 6.7)     | 82 10.1 (8.1, 12.4)   | 236 29.2 (26.1, 32.4) | 266 32.9 (29.6, 36.2) | 185 22.9 (20.0, 25.9) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| <b>Materials to support cognitive restructuring/change</b>   |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Mood diary   | 810                                    | 38 4.7 (3.3, 6.4)     | 64 7.9 (6.1, 10.0)    | 174 21.5 (18.7, 24.5) | 240 29.6 (26.5, 32.9) | 294 36.3 (33.0, 39.7) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Thought record   | 816                                    | 18 2.2 (1.3, 3.5)     | 23 2.8 (1.8, 4.2)     | 112 13.7 (11.4, 16.3) | 250 30.6 (27.5, 33.9) | 413 50.6 (47.1, 54.1) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| <b>Other materials</b>   |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Symptom measures e.g. PHQ-9  | 815                                    | 23 2.8 (1.8, 4.2)     | 21 2.6 (1.6, 3.9)     | 42 5.2 (3.7, 6.9)     | 100 12.3 (10.1, 14.7) | 629 77.2 (74.1, 80.0) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Providing a list of problems/goals   | 814                                    | 20 2.5 (1.5, 3.8)     | 22 2.7 (1.7, 4.1)     | 81 10.0 (8.0, 12.2)   | 240 29.5 (26.4, 32.7) | 451 55.4 (51.2, 58.9) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Creating a written agenda  | 809                                    | 36 4.4 (3.1, 6.1)     | 72 8.9 (7.0, 11.1)    | 139 17.2 (14.6, 20.0) | 174 21.5 (18.7, 24.5) | 388 48.0 (44.5, 51.5) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support identification of unhelpful thinking  | 814                                    | 15 1.8 (1.0, 3.0)     | 23 2.8 (1.8, 4.2)     | 95 11.7 (9.5, 14.1)   | 235 28.9 (25.8, 32.1) | 446 54.8 (51.3, 58.2) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Resources to support practical problem solving   | 814                                    | 36 4.4 (3.1, 6.1)     | 88 10.8 (8.8, 13.1)   | 287 35.3 (32.0, 38.7) | 220 27.0 (24.0, 30.2) | 183 22.5 (19.7, 25.5) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Case formulation, case summary or case conceptualisation worksheet   | 814                                    | 14 1.7 (0.9, 2.9)     | 26 3.2 (2.1, 4.6)     | 83 10.2 (8.2, 12.5)   | 239 29.4 (26.3, 32.6) | 452 55.3 (52.0, 59.0) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support the identification of conditional beliefs/underlying assumptions/"rules for living" | 811                                    | 31 3.8 (2.6, 5.4)     | 63 7.8 (6.0, 9.8)     | 197 24.3 (21.4, 27.4) | 265 32.7 (29.5, 36.0) | 255 31.4 (28.3, 34.8) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Relaxation materials   | 813                                    | 108 13.3 (11.0, 15.8) | 142 17.5 (14.9, 20.3) | 244 30.0 (26.9, 33.3) | 185 22.8 (19.9, 25.8) | 134 16.5 (14.0, 19.2) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Sleep diary  | 810                                    | 119 14.7 (12.3, 17.3) | 175 21.6 (18.8, 24.6) | 336 41.5 (38.1, 45.0) | 125 15.4 (13.0, 18.1) | 55 6.8 (5.2, 8.7)     |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Book and workbooks   | 811                                    | 129 15.9 (13.5, 18.6) | 172 21.2 (18.4, 24.2) | 246 30.3 (27.2, 33.6) | 150 18.5 (15.9, 21.3) | 114 14.1 (11.7, 16.6) |            |           |                 |           |  |  |
| Computerised CBT and online materials  | 811                                    | 433 53.4 (49.9, 56.9) | 181 22.3 (19.5, 25.3) | 132 16.3 (13.8, 19.0) | 39 4.8 (3.4, 6.5)     | 26 3.2 (2.1, 4.7)     |            |           |                 |           |  |  |

In sensitivity analyses to examine whether there were differences in the frequency of use of the 17 listed materials amongst therapists who responded to earlier or later invitations, there was little evidence of an association between timing of response and reported frequency of use of materials to support CBT.

### ***Therapist characteristics and frequency of material use***

Exploratory logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine the independent associations between seven therapist characteristics and frequency of use of the 17 resources. There were no therapist characteristics that were consistently independently associated with more/less frequent use of the different resources (data available from authors).

### ***Timing of material use***

Therapists indicated whether they gave the listed materials to clients for use between or during the therapy session. Materials were most likely to be used both within and between sessions (Table 3). There were a few exceptions—therapists predominantly used written agendas, case formulation, and problem lists exclusively within the session (86%, 57%, and 53% of therapists, respectively), whilst computerised CBT and online materials were mostly used to support CBT between sessions (62%).

### ***Effectiveness of CBT materials***

Therapists rated the effectiveness of the CBT materials in bringing about clinically helpful change, on a scale of 1 (not at all effective) to 9 (very effective) (Table 4). All the resources were considered at least moderately effective (median score  $\geq 5$ ), but some were rated more highly than others (Table 4). The resources viewed as the most effective (with a median score of 8) were: activity schedules, behavioural activation diary/plan, case formulation, thought records, and resources to support the identification of conditional beliefs. On the other hand, symptom measures, sleep diaries, and computerised CBT/online materials were rated as less effective (median score 5) by therapists.

There were some associations between the frequency of use and effectiveness ratings. Materials that were most frequently used (e.g. lists of problems/goals, activity schedules, behavioural activation diaries/plans, and case formulation worksheets) were also generally considered effective (median score was 7 or 8). In contrast, the use of symptom measures (the most frequently used resource) was considered one of the least effective tools.

In sensitivity analyses, there was again no evidence of an association between timing of response and resource effectiveness ratings of materials for the 16 of the 17 resources ( $p > 0.12$ ).

### ***Therapist characteristics and effectiveness ratings***

Multiple linear regression was used to examine the associations between therapist characteristics and their views on the effectiveness of the 17 listed resources. Female gender was independently associated with higher effectiveness ratings for nine out of the 17 resources ( $p$ -values for gender in the final models were all  $< 0.07$ ). There were no other consistent patterns to suggest that therapist characteristics were independently associated with effectiveness ratings (data available from the authors).

Table 3. Timing of use of materials to support one-to-one CBT for depression.

| CBT material   | No. responses | When did you use these materials? |                   |                 |                   |      |                   |
|--|---------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|
|  |               | Between sessions                  |                   | During sessions |                   | Both |                   |
|  |               | n                                 | % (95% CI)        | n               | (95% CI)          | n    | (95% CI)          |
| <b>Materials to support behavioural change</b>   |               |                                   |                   |                 |                   |      |                   |
| Activity schedules   | 797           | 89                                | 11.2 (9.1,13.6)   | 90              | 11.3 (9.2,13.7)   | 618  | 77.5 (74.5, 80.4) |
| Behavioural activation diary/plan  | 780           | 62                                | 8.0 (6.1, 10.1)   | 73              | 9.4 (7.4, 11.6)   | 645  | 82.7 (79.9, 85.3) |
| Written resources to support planned exposure  | 732           | 117                               | 16.0 (13.4,18.8)  | 145             | 19.8 (17.0, 22.9) | 470  | 64.2 (60.6, 67.7) |
| Behavioural experiments relating to depressive beliefs   | 746           | 90                                | 12.1 (9.8, 14.6)  | 126             | 16.9 (14.3, 19.8) | 530  | 71.1 (67.6, 74.3) |
| <b>Materials to support cognitive restructuring/change</b>   |               |                                   |                   |                 |                   |      |                   |
| Mood diary   | 745           | 142                               | 19.1 (16.3,22.1)  | 58              | 7.8 (6.0, 9.9)    | 545  | 73.2 (69.8, 76.3) |
| Thought record   | 789           | 47                                | 6.0 (4.4, 7.8)    | 60              | 7.6 (5.9, 9.7)    | 682  | 86.4 (83.8, 88.8) |
| <b>Other Materials</b>   |               |                                   |                   |                 |                   |      |                   |
| Symptom measures e.g. PHQ-9  | 786           | 126                               | 16.0 (13.5,18.8)  | 356             | 45.3 (41.8, 48.8) | 304  | 38.7 (35.3, 42.2) |
| Providing a list of problems/goals   | 776           | 26                                | 3.4 (2.2, 4.9)    | 413             | 53.2 (49.6, 56.8) | 337  | 43.4 (40.0, 47.0) |
| Creating a written agenda  | 740           | 15                                | 2.0 (1.1, 3.3)    | 634             | 85.7 (83.0, 88.1) | 91   | 12.3 (10.0, 14.9) |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support identification of unhelpful thinking  | 792           | 30                                | 3.8 (2.6, 5.4)    | 182             | 23.0 (20.1, 26.1) | 580  | 73.2 (70.0, 76.3) |
| Resources to support practical problem solving   | 763           | 48                                | 6.3 (4.7, 8.3)    | 229             | 30.0 (26.8, 33.4) | 486  | 63.7 (60.2, 67.1) |
| Case formulation, case summary or case conceptualisation worksheet   | 788           | 7                                 | 0.9 (0.4, 1.8)    | 449             | 57.0 (53.4, 60.5) | 332  | 42.1 (38.7, 45.7) |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support the identification of conditional beliefs/underlying assumptions/"rules for living" | 763           | 26                                | 3.4 (2.2, 5.0)    | 373             | 48.9 (45.3, 52.5) | 364  | 47.7 (44.1, 51.3) |
| Relaxation materials   | 688           | 194                               | 28.2 (24.9, 31.7) | 71              | 10.3 (8.1, 12.8)  | 423  | 61.5 (57.8, 65.1) |
| Sleep diary  | 665           | 235                               | 35.3 (31.7, 39.1) | 54              | 8.1 (6.2, 10.5)   | 376  | 56.6 (52.3, 60.3) |
| Book and workbooks   | 654           | 262                               | 40.1 (36.3, 43.9) | 55              | 8.4 (6.4, 10.8)   | 337  | 51.5 (47.6, 55.4) |
| Computerised CBT and online materials  | 343           | 214                               | 62.4 (57.0, 67.5) | 29              | 8.5 (5.7, 11.9)   | 100  | 29.3 (24.4, 34.3) |

**Table 4.** Therapists' views on the effectiveness of materials in bringing about clinically helpful change.<sup>a</sup>

| CBT Material   | Total responses<br>N | Median<br>(IQR) |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Materials to support behavioural change</b>   | 810                  | 8 (7, 8)        |
| Activity schedules   | 809                  | 8 (7, 9)        |
| Behavioural activation diary/plan  | 806                  | 7 (5, 8)        |
| Written resources to support planned exposure  | 805                  | 7 (6, 8)        |
| Behavioural experiments relating to depressive beliefs   |                      |                 |
| <b>Materials to support cognitive restructuring/change</b>   | 808                  | 7 (5, 8)        |
| Mood diary   | 809                  | 8 (7, 9)        |
| Thought record   |                      |                 |
| <b>Other Materials</b>   | 795                  | 5 (4, 7)        |
| Symptom measures e.g. PHQ-9  |                      |                 |
| Providing a list of problems/goals   | 807                  | 7 (6, 8)        |
| Creating a written agenda  | 807                  | 6 (5, 8)        |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support identification of unhelpful thinking  | 806                  | 8 (6, 9)        |
| Resources to support practical problem solving   | 804                  | 7 (5, 8)        |
| Case formulation, case summary or case conceptualisation worksheet   | 806                  | 8 (7, 9)        |
| Written or diagrammatic resources to support the identification of conditional beliefs/<br>underlying assumptions/"rules for living" | 804                  | 7 (6, 8)        |
| Relaxation materials   | 796                  | 6 (4, 7)        |
| Sleep diary  | 796                  | 5 (4, 7)        |
| Books and workbooks  | 785                  | 6 (5, 7)        |
| Computerised CBT and online materials  | 716                  | 5 (3, 6)        |

<sup>a</sup>1 = Not at all effective; 5 = Moderately effective; 9 = Very Effective

### Other resources used

Therapists were asked to list the books, computerised CBT, or online materials they used to supplement their one-to-one work with their last three clients with depression. Of the 818 respondents, 717 (88%) provided details of at least one resource in response to this question. Where resources were listed, participants detailed between one and 10 items, with a modal response of three resources. Resources named by more than 1% of respondents are listed in Table 5.

Websites that provided online resources (such as client worksheets) for therapists were very frequently cited, with the "Get Self Help" (<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk>), "Centre for Clinical Interventions" (<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au>), and "Psychology Tools" (<https://psychologytools.com>) websites being the most popular—these had been used by 47%, 30%, and 21% of the 717 respondents, respectively.

The most frequently cited books were *Mind Over Mood* (Greenberger & Padesky, 2015) (30%) and *Overcoming Depression* (Gilbert, 2009b) (11%), with a further 10% listing "Overcoming Depression" without any reference to the author. *Overcoming Low Self-Esteem* (Fennell, 1999) was cited by 10%, and the "Overcoming series" of books in general by a further 9%. A small proportion of therapists mentioned various computerised CBT packages e.g. "Living Life to the Full" (<http://www.lltf.com>), (7%); "MoodGYM" (<https://moodgym.anu.edu.au>), (4%); and "Beating the Blues" ([www.beatingtheblues.co.uk](http://www.beatingtheblues.co.uk)), (4%).

Participants listed a diverse range of other tools/media that they used in their practice with depressed clients. Worksheets were the most frequently mentioned and these included thought records, progress monitoring sheets, goal setting records, and self-

**Table 5.** Other books/computerised CBT/online materials used<sup>a</sup>.

| CBT Material   | Reference   | N   | % <sup>b</sup> |
|--|---|-----|----------------|
| "Get Self Help"  | <a href="https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk">https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk</a>       | 334 | 46.6           |
| "Centre for Clinical Interventions"                                    | <a href="http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au">http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au</a>   | 215 | 30.0           |
| Mind Over Mood   | Greenberger and Padesky (2015)  | 215 | 30.0           |
| "Psychology Tools"   | <a href="https://psychologytools.com">https://psychologytools.com</a>           | 151 | 21.0           |
| Overcoming Depression  | Gilbert (2009b)   | 77  | 10.7           |
| Overcoming Depression (Author not specified) <sup>c</sup>              |   | 72  | 9.9            |
| Overcoming Low Self Esteem   | Fennell (1999)  | 68  | 9.5            |
| The Overcoming series of books <sup>d</sup>                            |   | 62  | 8.6            |
| Compassionate Mind <sup>e</sup>  | Gilbert (2009a)   | 60  | 8.4            |
| "Living Life to the Full"  | <a href="http://www.lltff.com">http://www.lltff.com</a>                         | 51  | 7.1            |
| Five Areas resources   | Williams (2014, 2017)   | 46  | 6.4            |
| Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust materials             | <a href="https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/">https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/</a> | 43  | 6.0            |
| "Moodgym"  | <a href="https://moodgym.anu.edu.au">https://moodgym.anu.edu.au</a>             | 31  | 4.3            |
| Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time                               | Addis and Martell (2004)  | 29  | 4.0            |
| "Headspace"  | <a href="https://www.headspace.com">https://www.headspace.com</a>               | 28  | 3.9            |
| Black Dog resources  |   | 28  | 3.9            |
| The Mindful Way Through Depression                                     | Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zin (2007)                                 | 28  | 3.9            |
| Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World <sup>f</sup>             | Williams and Penman (2011)  | 27  | 3.8            |
| Beating the Blues  | <a href="http://www.beatingtheblues.co.uk">www.beatingtheblues.co.uk</a>        | 26  | 3.6            |
| "SilverCloud"  | <a href="http://www.silvercloudhealth.com">http://www.silvercloudhealth.com</a> | 20  | 2.8            |
| Behavioral Activation for Depression                                   | Martell, Dimidjian, and Herman-Dunn (2010)                                      | 19  | 2.6            |
| Feeling Good Handbook  | Burns (1999)  | 18  | 2.5            |
| Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders | Leahy, Holland, and McGinn (2011)   | 18  | 2.5            |
| The Happiness Trap   | Harris (2008)   | 17  | 2.4            |
| The Mental Health Handbook   | Powell (2009)   | 17  | 2.4            |
| "Moodjuice"  | <a href="http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk">www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk</a>        | 16  | 2.2            |
| An Introduction to Coping with Depression                              | Brosnan and Hogan (2007)  | 15  | 2.1            |
| Manage Your Mood   | Veale and Willson (2007)  | 15  | 2.1            |
| CBT for Dummies  | Branch and Willson (2010)   | 14  | 2.0            |
| Think Good Feel Good   | Stallard (2002)   | 12  | 1.7            |
| Compassionate Mind Approach to series <sup>g</sup>                     |   | 12  | 1.7            |
| Manage Your Mind   | Butler and Hope (2007)  | 11  | 1.5            |
| Cognitive Therapy of Depression  | Beck, Rush, Shaw, and Emery (1979)  | 11  | 1.5            |
| Depressive Illness: the Curse of the Strong                            | Cantopher (2012)  | 9   | 1.3            |
| "Big White Wall"   | <a href="https://www.bigwhitewall.com">https://www.bigwhitewall.com</a>         | 8   | 1.1            |
| Psychology Online (now Ieso Digital Health)                            | <a href="https://www.iesohealth.com/en-gb">https://www.iesohealth.com/en-gb</a> | 8   | 1.1            |
| <b>Generic resources/approaches (not otherwise specified)</b>          |   |     |                |
| Mindfulness  |   | 40  | 5.6            |
| Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)                                |   | 15  | 2.1            |
| Behavioural activation (BA)  |   | 14  | 2.0            |
| Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)                                       |   | 14  | 2.0            |
| Beck   |   | 12  | 1.7            |

<sup>a</sup> Therapists were asked to "list the books and/or computerised CBT/online materials that you used to supplement your one-to-one work with your last 3 clients with depression". Participants could report more than one additional resource used to support their practice

<sup>b</sup> As a percentage of the 717 participants who listed at least one resource.

<sup>c</sup> Where "Overcoming Depression" was cited without reference to the author, this could potentially include "Overcoming Depression" (Gilbert, 2009b), Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: a Five Areas Approach (C. Williams, 2014), or Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time (Addis & Martell, 2004).

<sup>d</sup> Some therapists listed "other Overcoming books", or "Overcoming series of books"

<sup>e</sup> Including Compassionate Mind Foundation (Gilbert), Compassionate Mind formulations/online resources, "Compassionate Mind", Compassion Focussed Therapy (Gilbert), Compassion-focussed (Gilbert), and Mindful Compassion (Gilbert; Gilbert & Choden, 2015)

<sup>f</sup> Including "Mindfulness—Williams"

<sup>g</sup> Compassionate Mind Approach to Building Your Self-Confidence (Welford, 2012); The Compassionate Mind Guide to Recovering from Trauma and PTSD (Lee & James, 2013), or "Compassionate Mind Guide to series"

compassion worksheets. Therapists also used various types of diaries. Technology such as videos (including YouTube), CDs/audio recordings (for relaxation, mindfulness etc.), and mobile applications (apps) were also listed.

Finally, in relation to psychotherapeutic approaches used, some therapists had applied so-called Third Wave therapies to treat recent patients including: Mindfulness, Compassion Focused Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy.

## Discussion

CBT is delivered in a manner that is flexible and responsive to the client's needs. As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that therapists employed a broad range of materials to support one-to-one CBT for depression. However, the frequency of use varied greatly between the materials listed.

The most frequently used resources (symptom measures, providing lists of problems and goals, activity schedules, behavioural activation tools, and case formulation) align with core competencies for CBT for depression (Roth & Pilling, 2007). With the exception of symptom measures, these frequently used resources were also considered some of the most effective. However, despite being the most frequently used tool, symptom measures such as the PHQ-9 were in fact considered one of the least effective tools for bringing about clinically helpful change. Frequent use of symptom measures such as the PHQ-9 was not unexpected given that the majority of respondents worked within IAPT services where such measures are a mandatory part of initial assessments and outcome reporting.

In contrast, relaxation materials, sleep diaries, books/workbooks, and computerised CBT/online materials were used the least. This may reflect the fact that such materials are often delivered as low-intensity interventions (step 2) within IAPT services and, therefore, those clients who receive high-intensity therapy are less likely to be offered something similar to the help they may have already received. Free CBT resources on websites such as "Get Self Help", the "Centre for Clinical Interventions", and "Psychology Tools" were often cited (for example, thought records, activity schedules, and psychoeducational materials) by therapists.

Most of the CBT materials used by therapists were employed both within and between therapy sessions. For instance, between 64% and 86% of respondents used materials to support behaviour change and cognitive restructuring in this way. It is possible that materials (e.g. thought records and activity diaries) were introduced within the session for patients to complete at home, and reviewed at the next session. In contrast, cCBT and other online materials were predominantly used only between sessions.

## Strengths and limitations

In total, 1027 therapists from a wide-range of backgrounds completed the survey. We recruited 818 accredited, high-intensity therapists. These participants were mostly experienced practitioners, and the majority worked within the NHS, providing IAPT services.

The recruitment strategy was comprehensive and included personalised invitations to BABCP members who were willing to be contacted about research, as well as

survey promotion at BABCP conferences and via IAPT service leads. However, as only 3665 out of ~4600 accredited members were willing to be contacted directly, this does introduce potential for bias. The overall response rate to personalised invites was 27%, which, despite several reminders, was somewhat lower than for previous, much smaller ( $n$  ranging from 254 to 329) BABCP surveys conducted between 1999 and 2005 (Keeley et al., 2002; MacLeod et al., 2008; Whitfield & Williams, 2014), where response rates ranged from 53% to 66%. It is possible that some members have become survey-fatigued due to repeated requests for their feedback, or have become uncontactable since registering their details with BABCP. We found that members were more likely to respond to postal invites than email requests (34% vs. 12%, respectively), and this may reflect members' reluctance to respond to unsolicited survey requests sent by email.

It is possible that those who did not use CBT resources, or found them ineffective, were less likely to respond. However, our sensitivity analysis showed no evidence of differences in resource use, or ratings of effectiveness between those who responded to the first invitation, or later reminders. We found that those working in IAPT services tended to reply later and thus it is possible that the views of these therapists were under-represented. The proportion of female respondents reflected the gender balance of the full sample of invitees, but we were unable to assess the representativeness of other therapist characteristics. However, therapist characteristics were not associated with frequency of resource use or views on effectiveness.

As with other self-report measures, participants' responses may be affected by other biases including acquiescence bias. Views on effectiveness may also be influenced by a therapist's training and knowledge of CBT, as well as their own clinical experience. Importantly, when describing resources, we used terminology that would be familiar to accredited CBT therapists—based on treatment manuals and key CBT resources for practitioners. To our knowledge, this is the largest survey of UK therapists to date and, provides valuable data about the resources that therapists use during therapy and their views on effectiveness.

### **Comparison with previous studies**

A previous survey of UK accredited therapists' views of structured self-help materials (Keeley et al., 2002) showed that most therapists recommended self-help resources, particularly for the treatment of depression, and most commonly to supplement individual therapy. Whilst Keeley's survey focused on self-help materials, and our survey relates to CBT resources more generally, there are some noteworthy similarities. Our survey showed numerous self-help materials are currently recommended, with *Mind Over Mood* (Greenberger & Padesky) being the most frequently cited book; this aligns with Keeley's findings 18 years previously.

Our findings suggest that the proportion of therapists recommending computerised resources has increased. Keeley et al. (2002) reported that most recommended materials were in written form, with only 7% of self-help prescribing therapists reporting use of computerised delivery. A similar practitioner survey conducted in 2001 (Whitfield & Williams) suggested that only 2% used computer-based self-help treatment for mental illness with their clients, with barriers including lack of training, personal knowledge and research regarding cCBT, as well as financial and practical constraints. Whilst relatively few

of our respondents reported frequent use of computerised materials to support one-to-one therapy for depression, we found that 24% had used these at least “sometimes”. This increase could be explained by the availability of research evidence into the effectiveness of cCBT, NICE guidelines (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2010) and increased provision of computerised therapy as part of low-intensity psychological services.

### **Clinical implications**

There continues to be a substantial gap between provision of, and demand for, psychological treatment. Technological innovations could potentially revolutionise mental health care and enable, rather than just support its delivery (Mohr et al., 2017), for example by enabling treatments to be delivered in a way that increases uptake and adherence to therapy. Previous qualitative research has highlighted the challenges of undertaking “homework” tasks including getting “caught” writing thoughts and feelings down on paper, or having to wait until the evening to recall earlier thoughts (Barnes et al., 2013). Mobile phone apps and online platforms have potential to allow discrete and more immediate completion of such tasks. Enabling greater engagement with therapy through completion of homework is important as this has been shown to improve outcomes (Kazantzis et al., 2010; Mausbach et al., 2010; Thase & Callan, 2006). CBT interventions that include remotely delivered, online elements could also improve adherence for those who find attending face-to-face appointments difficult or inconvenient.

The evidence from our survey on therapists’ use of, and views on the effectiveness of, CBT resources will be important for the development of novel approaches, which employ technology to enhance and enable the delivery of CBT. For example, these findings have implications for the design of integrated CBT platforms. Our data suggest that such systems should incorporate a range of resources from familiar sources and be designed to allow flexibility of use, with online resources accessible to patients and therapists to view and edit, both within and between the therapy sessions. This will enable therapists to tailor CBT delivered online to individual patient’s needs, as they do in face-to-face therapy.

### **Conclusion**

This large practitioner survey provided evidence on therapists’ use of materials to support one-to-one CBT for depression, and therapists’ perceived the effectiveness of such resources in bringing about clinically helpful change. Having more understanding about the materials that therapists use as an integral part of their work is important in the development of “technology-enabled” psychological services that may address the increasing demand for access to psychological services. Ensuring that online platforms incorporate a range of materials to enable therapists to tailor treatment to the individual patient’s needs is the key. Such platforms also need to be designed with input from experts in human-computer interaction to maximise engagement with, and thus ultimately benefit from, treatment. In this way, we may be able increase access to treatment by enabling therapy for those who find attending face-to-face sessions difficult, and by facilitating homework completion. This could potentially improve patient outcomes for the large number of patients with depression.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the therapists who participated in our survey. We thank June Johnstone and Vivien Jones for providing administrative support, and Eloisa Colman for facilitating the set-up of the study. We are also grateful to those colleagues who are involved with the INTERACT study as co-applicants but who have not participated in drafting this manuscript: Rachel Churchill, David Coyle, Simon Gilbody, Paul Lanham, Una Macleod, Irwin Nazareth, Steve Parrott, Katrina Turner, Nicky Welton, and Catherine Wevill.

This study was conducted in collaboration with the Bristol Randomised Trials Collaboration (BRTC), a UKCRC Registered Clinical Trials Unit (CTU), in receipt of National Institute for Health Research CTU support funding. Study data were collected and managed using REDCap (P. Harris et al., 2009) hosted at the University of Bristol.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR or the Department of Health.

## Disclosure statement

Chris Williams is the author of written and online CBT self-help resources, and is Director of a company which commercialises these resources. The other authors have no conflict of interests with respect to this publication.

## Funding

This article presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) (Programme Grants for Applied Research, Integrated therapist and online CBT for depression in primary care, [RP-PG-0514-20012]). The study was supported by the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at the University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust and the University of Bristol.

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## Ethical statements

The authors assert that all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, and its most recent revision. Authors have abided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct as set out by the American Psychological Association. Ethical approval was provided by the University of Bristol, Faculty of

Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (29/2/2016; REC reference 31642). HRA approval was also granted (8/3/2016; IRAS reference 198271).

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