

A Digital Approach to Improve Patient Engagement and Reduce 'Did Not Attends' in Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)

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BACKGROUND

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services provide evidence-based psychological therapies for anxiety disorders and depression. The most common treatment modality patients receive through IAPT services is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) which comprises an average of 6-8 sessions.¹ Appointments beyond the initial assessment have long waiting times, with some patients having to wait more than 3 months for a second appointment.² Long waiting times are thought to be one of the main reasons why patients disengage from the service and do not attend their appointments.

AIMS

To identify factors that lead patients to disengage from IAPT services, ultimately leading to 'did not attends' (DNAs).

Using the data collected, create a prototype mobile application which could be implemented to improve patient engagement, complement their therapy and ultimately reduce DNAs.

METHODS

Qualitative data collection was employed to attain in-depth insights regarding the issues within IAPT. This was facilitated through semi-structured interviews with eight Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners (PWPs) from eight different IAPT services in London. Thematic analysis via both latent and semantic approaches was used to explore and define the main concepts within the qualitative data. This was carried out using Braun and Clarke's Six Step Model.³ Results from the interviews were used to facilitate the design of an app prototype. Throughout the development of the prototype, we received feedback from PWPs and psychiatrists who provided insight into how we could make the app a patient centred experience.

RESULTS

The data identified three major contributing factors to DNAs: unrealistic expectations of the service due to inaccurate preconceptions; long wait times leading to loss of interest and disengagement; the terror barrier – the anxiety and fear of attending their initial appointment.

We designed our app to tackle these factors. It is not a replacement for therapy, but rather an adjunct which provides support throughout the IAPT journey.

APP FEATURES

To manage patient expectations, the app provides a view of the patient's IAPT journey ahead in the form of a digital journal with the following features:

- Descriptions of what patients can expect from each appointment
- The ability to tick off appointments and a progress bar with the number of appointments left
- The ability for PWPs to upload any homework patients have in between appointments

To tackle the terror barrier the app slowly prepares the patients for their upcoming appointments by asking questions gently, such as "How are you feeling about your appointment next week?" Depending on the patient's response, the app will gauge the reasons for these feelings and then provide appropriate guidance. For example, if patients are feeling nervous because they do not know what to expect from the appointment, the app will reassure them and educate them about what the appointment will consist of.

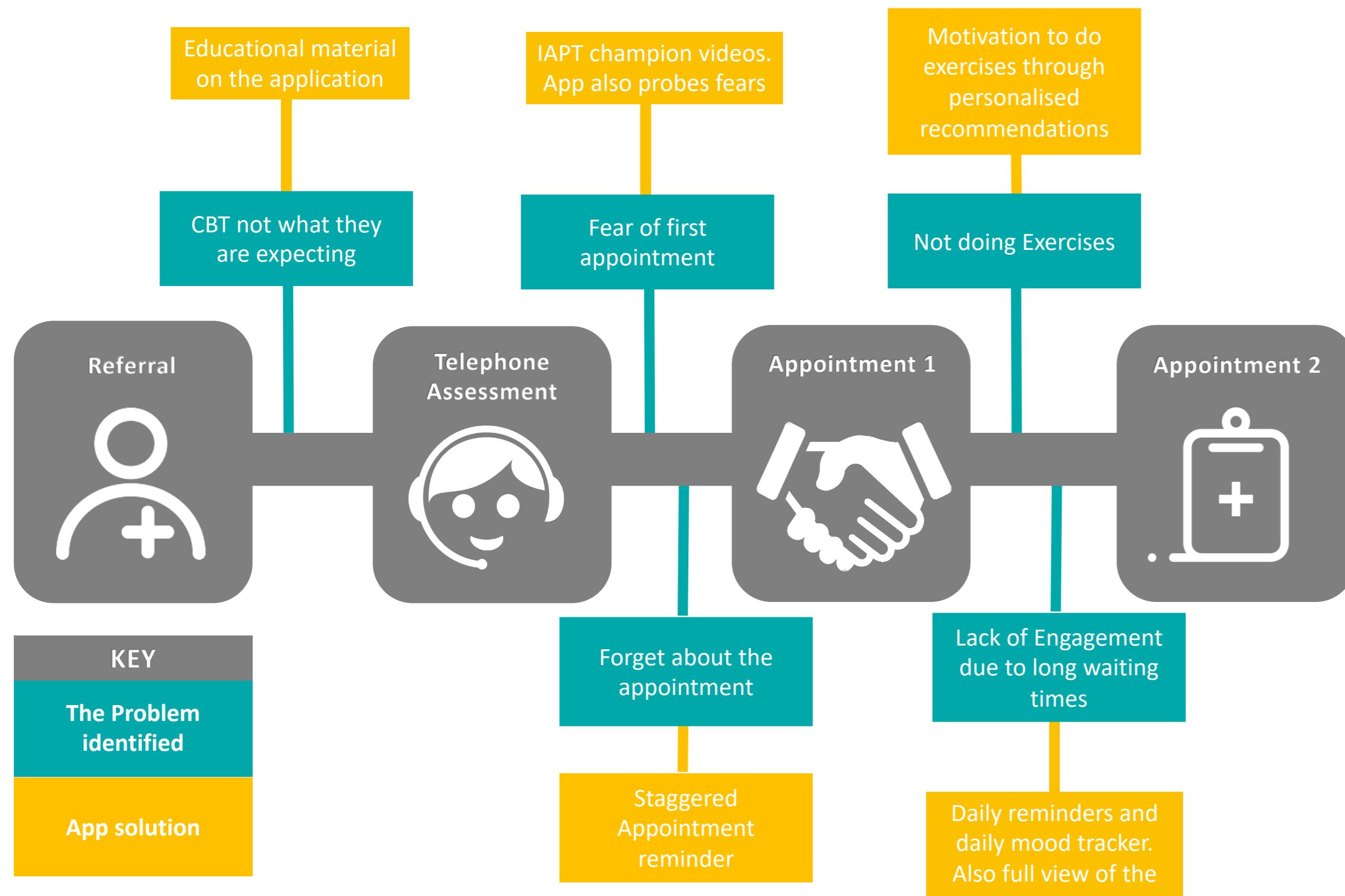


Figure 1 – The patient journey with the app

CONCLUSION

While patients are waiting for their next appointment they could be engaging with the app, which will encourage them to complete homework, reflect and track their mood. With this proactive engagement it could empower the patient, creating an eager anticipation for their next appointment rather than a sense of foreboding. To implement the app within the IAPT services, it would need to be piloted to assess its effectiveness and then evaluated by NHS digital.⁴

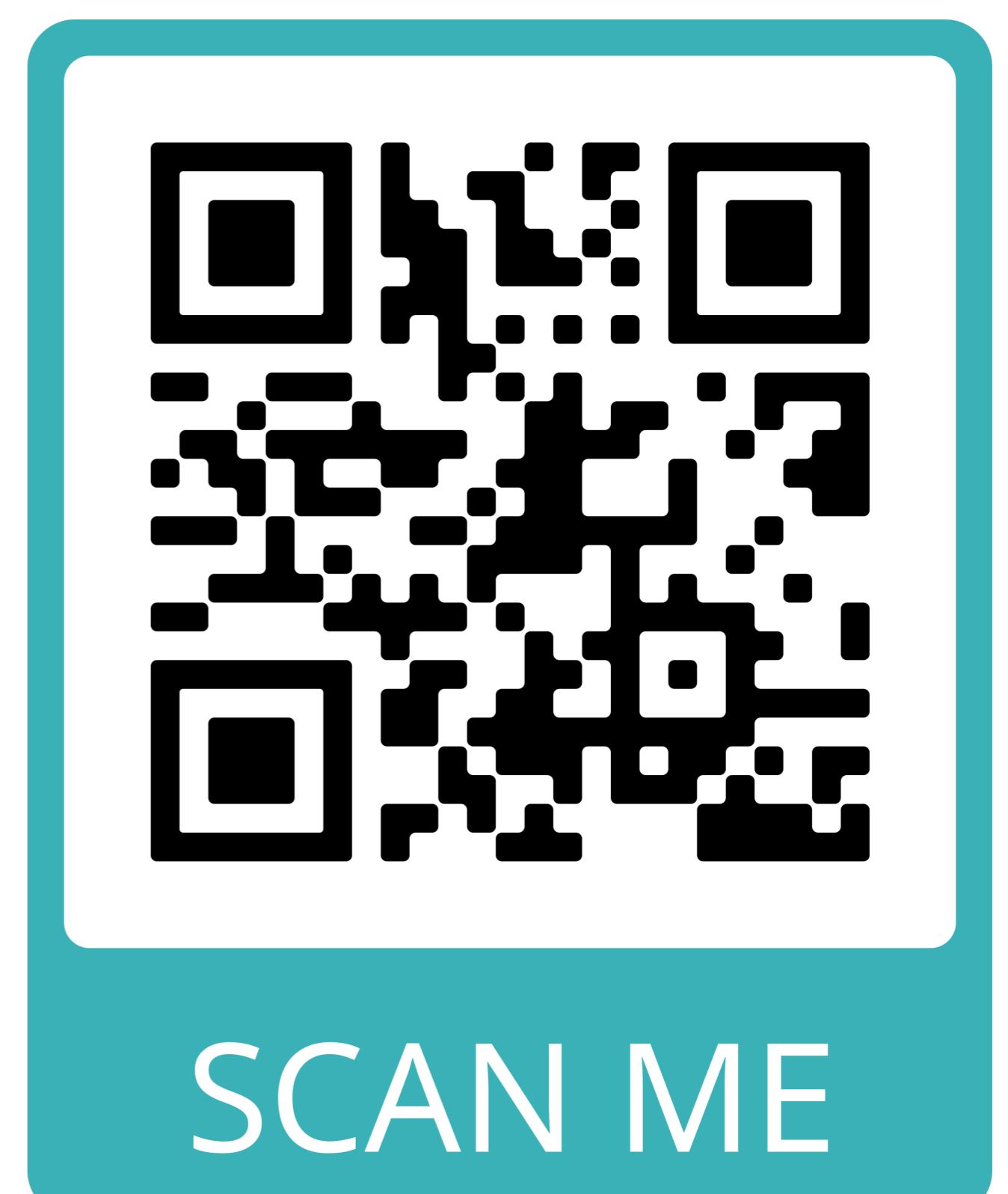


Figure 2 – QR code: Screenshots of the IAPT app prototype showing the different features of the app. Available from: <https://qrco.de/bbxghH>

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