

Pragmatic randomised controlled trial of guided self-help versus individual cognitive behavioural therapy with a trauma focus for post-traumatic stress disorder (RAPID)

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a common, disabling condition that can occur following major traumatic events. Typical symptoms include distressing reliving, avoidance of reminders and feeling a current sense of threat. First-choice treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder are individual, face-to-face talking treatments, of 12–16 hours duration, including cognitive behavioural therapy with a trauma focus. If equally effective treatments could be developed that take less time and can be largely undertaken in a flexible manner at home, this would improve accessibility, reduce waiting times and hence the burden of disease.

RAPID was a randomised controlled trial using a web-based programme called *Spring*. The aim was to determine if trauma-focused guided self-help provided a faster and cheaper treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder than first-choice face-to-face therapy, while being equally effective.

Guided self-help using *Spring* is delivered through eight steps. A therapist provides a 1-hour introductory meeting followed by four further, fortnightly sessions of 30 minutes each and four brief (around 5 minutes) telephone calls or e-mail contacts between sessions. At each session, the therapist reviews progress and guides the client through the programme, offering continued support, monitoring, motivation and problem-solving.

One hundred and ninety-six people with post-traumatic stress disorder to a single traumatic event took part in the study. Guided self-help using *Spring* was found to be equally effective to first-choice face-to-face therapy at reducing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms at 16 weeks.

Very noticeable improvements were maintained at 52 weeks post-randomisation in both groups, when most results were inconclusive but in favour of face-to-face therapy. Guided self-help using *Spring* was significantly cheaper to deliver and appeared to be well-tolerated.

It is noteworthy that not everyone benefitted from guided self-help using *Spring*, highlighting the importance of considering it on a person-by-person basis, and personalising interventions. But, the RAPID trial has demonstrated that guided self-help using *Spring* provides a low-intensity treatment option for people with post-traumatic stress disorder that is ready to be implemented in the National Health Service.

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