

Funding for Internet-based cognitive behaviour therapy leads to important benefits to Saskatchewan residents

By Everett Dorma **Posted:** February 19, 2016 3:30 p.m.



(l to r) Mr. Russell Williams, President Innovative Medicines Canada, Mr. Bill Gowen, Sanofi Canada, Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos, Department of Psychology, Ms. Anne Babineau, Prairies Director Innovative Medicines Canada, Mr. Dan Ekstrand, GlaxoSmithKline Inc., Mr. Luke Schneider, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology. Photo by Rae Graham, U of R Photography.

Members of Innovative Medicines Canada, sponsors of Canada's Health Research Foundation (HRF) visited the University of Regina to discuss Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos' research into Internet-based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for depression and anxiety.

Depression and anxiety are highly prevalent and disabling conditions that are frequently undertreated, particularly in rural and remote areas. There is growing evidence that Internet-based cognitive behaviour therapy is effective for treating these conditions.

"I really appreciate the support I've received from HRF and my other funding partners, which has allowed me to develop and research the only provincial clinic in Canada exploring the utility

of Internet-based Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, or ICBT, for the treatment of depression and anxiety,” says Hadjistavropoulos.

“We are thrilled as a Foundation to be able to support innovative health research such as that being conducted by Dr. Hadjistavropoulos and her team,” says Russell Williams, President, Innovative Medicines Canada and Treasurer of the HRF. “The Foundation is a non-profit organization supported by the member companies of Innovative Medicines Canada that invests in health research in Canadian academic centres, and promotes the benefits and values of research-driven health innovation in Canada.”

The University of Regina’s Online Therapy Unit, under the direction of Dr. Heather Hadjistavropoulos, offers an Internet-based course originally developed by Nickolai Titov, Professor at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia and Director of the MindSpot Clinic, an Australia-wide online and telephone treatment service for people with anxiety and depression.

“ICBT involves patients reviewing strategies for coping with symptoms of depression and anxiety over the Internet along with patients communicating with a therapist over a secure email system,” says Hadjistavropoulos. “ICBT is advantageous for those who have difficulties accessing care, due to location, time, or physical or mental health constraints.”

The current research involves a partnership between researchers and decision makers responsible for mental health programming in rural and urban areas of Saskatchewan to improve access to ICBT.

“Approximately 80 per cent of the clients who enter the program complete it and report significant improvement equal to those typically obtained when individuals receive traditional cognitive behaviour therapy in person,” says Hadjistavropoulos. “This research has the potential to significantly influence how ICBT is managed and delivered not only in Saskatchewan, but in other areas of Canada.”

“As a partner in Canada’s health care delivery system, the pharmaceutical industry, through the HRF, supports research such as this to develop practical applications that improves health care for all Canadians,” says Williams. “I believe this research could lead to the development of cost effective programs across the country for the treatment of a variety of mental health and wellness issues.”

In addition to the funding received by the HRF, Dr. Hadjistavropoulos’ research has been funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation.

For more information on the Online Therapy Unit visit: <https://www.onlinetherapyuser.ca/>.