

Symposium | AI&IT : [Symposium 29] Trends in mental health in Japan from the perspective of social changes

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(Conference Room C)

[Symposium 29] Trends in mental health in Japan from the perspective of social changes

Moderator: Masato Masuda (Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Fukuoka University), Rika Tanaka (Studio Rika Clinic)

[SY-29-01] Telepsychiatry and Occupational Mental Health in Japan: Opportunities and Challenges

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In Japan, despite the global acceleration of telemedicine, online psychiatric care continues to face significant barriers. One of the primary challenges is the lower reimbursement rate for telepsychiatry compared to face-to-face consultations, a disparity that persists even after deregulation prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kinoshita & Kishimoto, 2022). This reimbursement gap has notably delayed the widespread adoption of telepsychiatry, setting Japan apart from most other developed nations. Recent evidence, however, demonstrates strong clinical support for telepsychiatry. A multicenter randomized controlled trial conducted across Japan showed that live two-way video consultations are non-inferior to in-person psychiatric treatment for common mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Importantly, patient satisfaction, clinical outcomes, and treatment retention were equivalent between online and face-to-face formats, with telepsychiatry providing additional convenience and accessibility benefits (Kishimoto et al., 2024). The integration of telepsychiatry with occupational health services presents significant potential. For instance, small businesses employing fewer than 50 workers—typically below the threshold required to appoint occupational physicians under Japanese law—can benefit from remote mental health consultations. Moreover, technological innovations, including artificial intelligence-driven administrative tools, can enhance operational efficiency by streamlining documentation and follow-up processes. Nonetheless, the rapid growth of telemedicine also brings emerging ethical and practical concerns. Increasingly prevalent commercial services advertise immediate issuance of medical leave certificates via online consultations, while "job resignation assistance" services gain popularity. These trends underscore the importance of establishing clear guidelines and regulations to safeguard the integrity of psychiatric practice. This presentation will explore these opportunities and challenges, outlining potential pathways to effectively integrate telepsychiatry within occupational mental health frameworks in Japan.