

# Digital age offers new techniques in mental health

Continued from Page 1

negative connotations and discrimination attached. Many who deal with mental illness fear being labeled and often face discrimination. According to the Mental Health Foundation, many who deal with these issues also find that their struggle worsens and their difficulties are harder to recover from.

Because not everyone is comfortable with being approached, the Health Center and STEP Up Ohlone have found a way to connect to students on their most familiar territory: technology.

Together, they have developed an app, "Life This Week," that features a short survey to help determine how students are doing each week. It features five indicators, stress, depression, anxiety, sleep, and anger which are then forwarded to a database where the Health Center hopes to calculate the levels of stress the student is going through and the possible causes that may be triggering it.

"Depending on their responses, a tailored message emerges along with information on how to access services if needed," said Sang Leng Trieu, project director of STEP Up Ohlone. "The results of the app helps to inform the health center staff how students are doing from more of a cross-sectional basis," says Trieu.

The survey, which takes less than a minute to complete, is available for students and staff to take on either of two iPads located at the Health Center offices at the Newark and Fremont Campus.

In addition, STEP Up Ohlone has adopted an online training simulation to help faculty, staff and

students support students who struggle with psychological distress, including depression and suicidal thoughts; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning students who are struggling because of harassment or exclusion; and student veterans who are facing challenges in adjusting to college life.

Users learn by engaging in interactive role-play conversations with emotionally responsive student avatars. The suite is available for free to all California community college faculty, staff and students, thanks to a grant from the California Mental Health Services Authority.

To take the training, go to [www.kognito.com/cc](http://www.kognito.com/cc).

Through the Health Center, Ohlone student Jenn Shue found the peace and acceptance she needed to get through a fully loaded semester and ensure academic success.

"When I first came to Ohlone and met Dr. Sally (Bratton, director of the Health Center) and her staff, it was the worst time in my life," Shue said. "Without their help I never would have regained my family's support and gotten the treatment I needed."

Each day 35 million people answer the question, "What's on your mind?" A Facebook feed can vary from posts about what friends are having for lunch to what the weekend agenda looks like, but often people also reveal serious and emotionally sensitive material.

Everyone uses social media differently, sometimes as a cry for help. Technology and social media are moving so fast that it can be difficult for parents and teachers to keep up, but the importance of being able to maneuver these platforms is not be-

coming any less demanding.

Hilary Roberts, former Peer Resources coordinator at John F. Kennedy High School in Fremont, understands that times are changing and the best thing to do is to get with the program.

"Technology is here to stay, and we are going to have to choose what to do with it," she said. "Are we going to learn how to navigate it in a positive way or are just going to say, 'Oh, in the old days.' Well, it's not the old days ... Last year's 18-year-olds, they were born into a world of technology. They're technology natives. I'm a foreigner so I have to learn the language. That's my responsibility as an educator."

In the Peer Resources program, students are trained in conflict resolution, teen advocacy work, and intervention for those with mental health needs. When a student does or has plans to do something harmful to themselves or others, Peer Advocates are trained to report the situation.

Because situations like these arise every day and are not always so obvious, Roberts said it's important to stay connected with students even after they have graduated.

Using platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, Roberts makes herself available to all former students to report anything that needs attention. Numerous times students have noticed alarming posts and instantly contacted Roberts to report situations such as gang activity, child abuse and even suicide attempts.

In one such scenario, "Within hours we were able to have this kid in a safe place," Roberts said.

When used the right way, technology and social media can be the gateway to reach-

## A Three-part Series

April 23:

What is the impact of mental illness at Ohlone and other college campuses?

May 2:

What is being done to improve mental health on campus and in the community as a whole?

May 14:

What is the future of mental health treatment? What can be done to increase awareness about the issue?

## Resources

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Anyone who needs help, or knows someone who does, can call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK. For more information, go to <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>.

### Crisis Support Services of Alameda County

People of all ages and backgrounds in Alameda County can call the 24-hour crisis hot line at 800-309-2131.

### The Trevor Project

The project offers a 24-hour toll-free confidential crisis and suicide-prevention helpline for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth. Call 866-4-U-TREVOR.

### STEP Up Ohlone

Ohlone College's campaign to promote student mental health, prevent suicide, and reduce stigma and discrimination about the issue. For more information and resources, go to <http://stepupohlone.org>.

### Ohlone Student Health Center

The Health Center is in Room 7302 on the third floor of Building 7 on the Fremont campus. It is Room NC 1214 on the second floor of Wing 2 on the Newark campus. For more information, call 510-659-6258 or go to <http://www.ohlone.edu/org/healthcenter>.

ingsituations that otherwise might not get the attention needed. Inspired to lend a helping hand, two young innovators, Jacob Savage and Doug Marks, came together to create something that does exactly that. While attending a festival in Oregon, Savage noticed that no police enforcement was present and everything still remained under control thanks to an organized first-response team. "I found out they provide the same services not only during the festival but 365 days a year," he said. "They work with the police department to provide mental health first response. It was the first time I've ever seen it and it was the most amazing thing I've ever seen."

He was inspired to bring something similar to his community. Together, Savage and Marks developed Concrn, an app that provides a compassionate response to scenarios where help is needed but police work may not be the best approach.

"With a single tap, Concrn sends your name, phone number and location to a network of civilian responders in your area," according to the organization's website.

The app allows the user to create a report requesting help for him- or herself or for someone else who may be in need. When making a report, it easily can be customized by describing the urgency of the incident, including a brief description of the person including gender, age group and ethnicity.

The app also consists of sections to define the setting where the incident is taking place, as well as what the person's state of mind may be.

Lastly, it has a feature that

allows a photo and notes to be added to the report, making it easier for the responder to find the incident and provide the best help possible.

Already in partnership with the Las Vegas Downtown Rangers, a group that assists the community, Concrn also is teaming up with universities such as Stanford to share their approach on compassionate care. Although responders might not be available in every area, Concrn encourages reports to be made so that local governments and nonprofit organizations recognize the need for it in their communities as well.

Still, while advances in technology can play an essential role, discrimination and other barriers still must be broken. Mental health experts say the media can play a major role in this.

The Associated Press in March added an entry on mental illness to its AP Stylebook, a style and usage guide used by many newspapers and other news outlets.

"It is the right time to address how journalists handle questions of mental illness in coverage," Kathleen Carroll, AP senior vice president and executive editor, said in a statement. "This isn't only a question of which words one uses to describe a person's illness. There are important journalistic questions, too."

Melissa McCoy, a media consultant and a visiting faculty member at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, spoke about reporting on mental health issues at the Journalism Association of Community Colleges' State Convention in Sacramento last month. She said journalists should be deeply concerned about the issue, given that "one in

four Americans will have a mental health issue in any given year."

"It's not something that was talked about in newsrooms very often, and I think it's starting to be talked about a lot more, which is good, because it's an extremely important topic," she said.

One major problem, McCoy said, is news coverage about mental illness tends to focus on mass shootings and other acts of violence. In fact, she said, people with mental illnesses are responsible for a small fraction of violent acts against others.

"We're very good at talking about violence as it regards mental health," she said. "Mental illness equals violence" – and it's just not true. ... We know that people are much more likely to be victims of crime than the perpetrators of crime, when they have a mental illness."

Other institutions, including colleges like Ohlone, also are trying to dispel misconceptions about mental illness. As part of that effort, members of the STEP Up Ohlone team and the Health Center would like to see mental health incorporated into the college's planning process in the future.

"The promotion of mental health should be and needs to be part of the campus infrastructure if we as a community are seriously committed to creating an environment where students can thrive," Trieu said.



Heavy Facebook users might be comparing themselves to their friends, which in turn can make them feel more depressed – Mai-Ly Steers



## Student Trainings



## Faculty & Staff Trainings

These are screen grabs from an online training simulation to help faculty, staff and students support students who struggle with psychological distress, including depression and suicidal thoughts; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning students who are struggling because of harassment or exclusion; and student veterans who are facing challenges in adjusting to college life. Users learn by engaging in interactive role-play conversations with emotionally responsive student avatars. The suite is available for free to all California community college faculty, staff and students, thanks to a grant from the California Mental Health Services Authority. To take the training, go to [www.kognito.com/cc](http://www.kognito.com/cc).

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