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New app for prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression – like a therapist-in-your-pocket

Monash University Doctor of Clinical Psychology student, David Bakker, has developed and released an iPhone app, MoodMission, which helps users learn better ways of coping with low moods and anxious feelings.

While most mental health apps are like single tools or small toolsets, MoodMission is like a giant toolbox with an expert assistant suggesting the right ones. Plus MoodMission uses an algorithm to learn a user's coping style, so the more a user uses the app, the better it gets at tailoring future support. In this way, MoodMission is like a therapist in your pocket, with loads of great ideas on how to deal with the low moods or anxiety you're facing.

Users report how they're feeling to MoodMission, which then accesses a large database of mental health strategies and suggests 5 to the user. These 5 'Missions' are selected based on the available research and are tailored to the user's needs. Missions are short, easily achievable strategies taken from evidence-based psychological therapies.

David, and supervisor Associate Professor Nikki Rickard, have been working on MoodMission for the past 2 and a half years. In October 2015 MoodMission successfully crowdfunded $20,000 to fund initial development. Following this, app development firm Spark Digital helped build the app, which is now freely available on the iOS App Store. MoodMission has recently been accepted into Monash University's Accelerator program for start-ups, and won the People's Choice Award at Monash's Elevator Awards. A post on image sharing site Imgur went viral in October 2016 and received over 300,000 views. Thousands of commenters requested an Android version, so another crowdfunding campaign was launched and successfully raised the $8000 required on November 23rd.

MoodMission is based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which is the most effective, evidence-based treatment for anxiety and depression problems. Clinical psychologists who use CBT often help their clients find ways of breaking vicious cycles that maintain unhelpful thoughts, feelings, or behaviours. MoodMission works in a similar way by recommending useful, brief, easily achieved coping strategies to users to help them deal with negative thoughts, feelings, or behaviours.

MoodMission uses gamification to reward users for completing missions, motivating them towards overcoming low moods or anxious feelings. In this way, MoodMission will bring the same design principles that have found success in apps for fitness and physical health to mental health.

MoodMission is designed to be used by anyone, whether they have a clinically significant anxiety or mood disorder, or just want to find ways of coping with day-to-day feelings of anxiousness or low moods. A randomised controlled trial is now underway to ensure that it is effective.

The app is not a replacement for professional support, but can be used to deal with nonclinical problems and supplement clinical support.

For more information about the project visit: moodmission.com