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Screening for suicide risk

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General practitioners have limited consultancy time to work with patients presenting with mental health problems and their options are limited in terms of what they can do for these patients. An online tool for assessing suicide risk has been developed in order to help GPs detect when the level of patient distress is high and this paper explores the options for integrating this tool within medical practices. The tool was developed by using binary logistic regression to predict self reported suicide ideation in an online sample of nearly 17,000 clients on the basis of K6 and other relevant data. The model performed well for males and females in all age groups (18-64) and was validated using a diagnostic measure for depression. A sample of ten healthcare professionals have highly commended the simplicity of the tool and confirmed the need for such a tool, especially if it can be incorporated in the medical software utilized by medical centers. However, the actual implementation requires more testing. In order to be effective the risk of false alarm must be minimized, but at the same time patient safety must be ensured. A suicidal barometer model is envisaged with appropriate recommendations for GP actions matched to the level of risk predicted. There is some degree of dissension in the field regarding how this should be done, although appropriately designed (online) education materials, direct questioning regarding suicide planning, the development of safety plans with patients and finally, emergency assistance (e.g. hospitalization) are commonly considered as useful approaches.

Biography

Denny Meyer has completed a DBL from the University of South Africa. She is an Associate Professor of Statistics at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. She has published more than 100 papers in reputable journals.

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