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Homebound boost online mental health platforms



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APRIL 23, 2020



Much of the world's workforce is sat working from home and many others are out on the frontline, either in hospitals or retail. That is presenting new potential customers for a host of online mental health services across Europe as they seek to plug the gap where the public sector has pulled back. Employers, health care providers and individuals – including children stuck at home – are now bumping up demand.

“Over a period of days, every local authority in the UK saw their current mental health services shutting down because the majority of those were face-to-face services,” says Tim Barker, who took over the helm at London-based XenZone earlier this year. “Plus, a lot of our general wellbeing is gone because we're inside and the hobbies that we engage with have stopped.”

The lockdown has seen a 35% increase in usage at XenZone for this time period versus last year. It has also forced an accelerated rollout for the company in Birmingham, the UK's second-largest city, to deliver online mental health support for an additional 250k children. XenZone's main solution is Kooth, which is aimed at 11 to 18-year-olds and serves around 85% of NHS trusts. Barker says he is “pretty confident” that the service will soon be at nationwide coverage.

Exclusive data from XenZone gives insight into the types of online mental health solutions which could now be scaleable. Anonymised aggregation from Kooth shows a 380% jump in concerns related to parental mental health issues, a 150% rise in concerns relating to alcoholic parents, and a 55% increase around physical abuse. Barker says that information can then be sent back to CCGs, who can then use it to inform future partnerships.

“We're looking at specific support for our current cohort of children and young people but then also looking at how we can expand our other product aimed at adults: that could be support for carers or support for parents. We can be very specific and focused with the type of support that we provide.”

Dutch company Karify, which gives healthcare providers a platform to offer online therapy and communication services, also tells HBI that it's seen increased demand among existing customer bases. “We've seen an enormous increase in demand. In the past couple of weeks we've added about 20 new

large customers and had about 30k new patients signed up,” says CEO Joris Moolenaar, adding that video sessions that replaced normal sessions are 7% longer than the normal session would have been.

“We help our customers keep therapy available for most patients, who would otherwise not receive important care for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and others. We’re grateful that we could scale this fast to help out,” Moolenaar adds.

Online mental health had already been accelerating before COVID. US-provider SilverCloud raised \$16m earlier this month in a Series B led by the MemorialCare Innovation Fund to further develop therapies across the States, the UK and Europe. A spokesperson tells HBI that the company is providing free mental health support to NHS staff during the crisis and it’s part of a new mental health roll-out in Manchester.

Its CEO, Ken Cahill, said at the time: “SilverCloud enables easier, earlier access to clinically validated mental health care that shows results equivalent to face-to-face care for the 1 in 5 people with a diagnosable mental health condition. With millions of people being asked to stay home and health systems needing to prioritise care, we recognise the heightened need for virtual support as the world copes with the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Barker, Xenzone, adds: “We’ve also just made our services available to corporates and organisations. The ones we’re currently dealing with are in the 10s of thousands of employees areas, often with a very distributed workforce at the frontline. We have no plans not to serve SMEs but to start off it’s useful to engage with more mature organisations and as we look at how we can make it more self-service we can make it available to everyone.”

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