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Treatment Retention Intervention for Emerging Adults in Outpatient Psychotherapy

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Emerging Adults (ages 18-25) with serious mental health conditions have poor functioning, yet are more likely to drop out of treatment than older adults.

We developed a manualized MET to be used prior to other treatment (MET-EA) and conducted a randomized trial of the MET compared to usual treatment in a community mental health agency.

Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) is a structured brief form of Motivational Interviewing (MI) with demonstrated effectiveness for treatment retention in adults, but has not been used in emerging adults for treatment retention.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) Principles fit with Emerging Adult needs:
- R = resist righting reflex
- U = understand client
- E = empower client
- L = listen to client
- I = listen to client
- A = affirms and reflections support

Therapist Fidelity

Mechanisms of Action
- Intention to attend Tx
- Ambivalence about attending Tx

MET-EA
- Reflective listening, acceptance & affirmation, client choice & control, directive
- Elicit clients' reasons for seeking psychotherapy
- Explore history distress/coping, therapy experience/hopes
- Provide education about therapy
- Collaborate on problem-solving client-identified treatment barriers
- Negotiate a plan for staying in treatment
- Identify & explore ambivalence about Tx

Instrumental Goals
- Strong working alliance
- Strong therapy self-efficacy
- Positive beliefs about therapy

Ultimate Goals
- 1 Session attended
- Missed sessions
- Treatment dropout
- Distress

Characteristics of Emerging Adults That May Impede Typical Engagement
- Rejection of authority as part of identity formation
- Irrelevance of the direction of therapy to the actual problems they face
- Less mature goal setting and pursuit

Our logic model proposes that the MET improves therapeutic alliance, increases client self-efficacy and normalizes beliefs about therapy via decreasing ambivalence and increasing intention to stay in therapy.