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Use of a socially assisting robot “Pepper” in psychoeducational training sessions for patients in acute psychiatric treatment - a project description of a feasibility study

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Background: The development of new technologies, such as robots, is gradually accelerating and transforming healthcare. At a time when human resources are becoming increasingly scarce, robots should be considered to support existing treatment options. Therapies in psychiatric settings should always have a multimodal approach, they should be cost-effective and readily accepted. Therefore, it is highly in demand to include new technologies (e.g., a socially assistive robots (SAR)) in psychiatric treatment. Currently, the use of new technologies in the psychiatric therapy is largely limited to mobile apps and online websites. However, SAR have the potential to support traditional psychiatric therapy, for example, through psychoeducational training. Nevertheless, the use of robots in psychiatry is almost non-existent. The aim of this feasibility-study is to find out whether patients undergoing acute psychiatric inpatient treatment are satisfied with psychoeducation training sessions with the SAR named Pepper. **Method:** The study will be conducted at the Clinical Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapeutic Medicine at the Medical University Graz between March 2023 and August 2023. Patients are given the opportunity to complete psychoeducational training sessions with SAR Pepper during their inpatient stay in addition to their psychotherapy and medication. Standardized and non-standardized questionnaires, which are completed before the first (t1) and after the last (t2) training session, as well as focus group interviews are used to check acceptance criteria and individual beliefs. **Results:** We present the study plan, outcome variables, and the questionnaires to measure acceptance in SAR. **Conclusion:** Due to the rapid development of robotic programs and the variety of potential opportunities in therapy support for psychiatric patients, it is important to scientifically evaluate the use of SAR in the psychiatric setting.