MedTech

VA contracts with DARPA-backed startup for real-time behavioral analytics, mental health app

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has contracted with Boston-based startup Cogito for use of its real-time behavioral analytics mobile app that analyzes voice recordings and mobile phone usage to create clinically validated behavioral indicators of mental health. The agency said it will use the Cogito app to detect veterans in need of mental health care, including suicide prevention.

Cogito Companion app-- Courtesy of Cogito

The VA use of the app is expected to enable healthcare managers to better assess veterans' mental health and then to implement outreach strategies for at-risk patients. The predictive behavioral model has been validated through research by agencies including the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

In fact, the NIMH is backing an ongoing **300-patient trial of the Cogito app** in patients within the age range of 18 and 70 and who have been referred to the South Huntington Clinic for behavioral health care. The app will offer real-time feedback on the patient's mental health based on its monitoring and analysis of voice interactions monitored by the smartphone.

The trial will assess treatment outcome and quality of life outcome as primary endpoints at 6 months; it will also measure other aspects such as self-care behavior and cost of care as secondary endpoints. It started in November and is slated to have final data in 2016.

"Improving the quality of life of the over 20 million veterans in the United States is a critical and important mission," said Joshua Feast, Cogito founder and CEO, in a statement. "The fact the VA is investing in novel behavioral analytics and mobile sensing technology to improve the mental health of veterans demonstrates their commitment to finding innovative solutions that will improve health outcomes."

The Cogito technology was developed in more than 15 years of research at the MIT Media Lab; the Companion app is intended to reveal unconscious signals in the human voice that disclose information about relationships and state of mind.