

User Interview Guide: Clinicians

Research Goal: Understanding clinical perspectives on why patients with depression or bipolar disorder abandon mental health apps

Duration: 45-60 minutes per participant

Format: 1-on-1 semi-structured interview

Target Participants: 2-3 clinicians who treat MDD/BP1 (psychiatrists, therapists, psychiatric nurses)

Opening Script

"Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to participate in this research. I'm studying why patients with depression or bipolar disorder sometimes struggle to use mental health apps, even when they want help. I'm interested in your clinical observations about what helps patients engage with digital tools versus what creates barriers.

I want to understand what you observe when patients try to use digital tools, and what actually helps vs. hinders their progress."

Interview Questions

Question 1: Patient Engagement During Symptomatic Periods

"When your patients are in a depressive episode or experiencing acute symptoms, do they typically engage with apps or digital tools? What barriers do you observe?"

Follow-up probes:

- What do patients tell you about why they stopped using apps during difficult periods?
 - What level of effort can patients realistically handle when symptomatic?
 - In your clinical experience, what's the maximum cognitive load a patient in a depressive episode can manage for a digital tool?
 - Have you seen any digital tools that successfully engage patients even during acute episodes?
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Question 2: Onboarding and Initial Setup Barriers

"When you recommend apps to patients, do they usually complete the setup process? What do they tell you about the onboarding experience?"

Follow-up probes:

- What types of questions or data entry are too burdensome for patients in active episodes?
 - What's the maximum amount of effort a struggling patient can handle during first use?
 - Do patients need different onboarding experiences based on their current symptom severity?
 - Have you seen apps that do onboarding well for psychiatric populations?
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Question 3: Shame, Guilt, and Judgmental App Features

"Do patients ever mention feeling judged or pressured by apps—things like streak counters, missed dose alerts, or 'you haven't logged in X days' notifications? What impact does this have?"

Follow-up probes:

- What kinds of app features do you see actually worsen guilt or shame in patients?
 - How does app-induced shame affect treatment engagement overall?
 - What language or design would feel supportive rather than judgmental for your patient population?
 - Have patients ever stopped using apps because they felt judged by them?
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Question 4: Medication Adherence Monitoring

"How do you currently monitor medication adherence with patients? Do apps help or hurt this process?"

Follow-up probes:

- What do patients tell you about medication reminder apps—do they help or create more stress?
- When patients miss doses, what are the actual reasons? (Not just "forgot")
- How should an app handle non-adherence in a clinically responsible but non-shaming way?

- Would you trust app-reported adherence data for clinical decision-making? What would make it credible?
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Question 5: Patient Insight Into Triggers and Patterns

"How do you help patients identify their triggers and patterns? Do digital tools play a role in this?"

Follow-up probes:

- Can patients accurately self-report triggers in the moment, or is retrospective analysis more reliable?
 - What kinds of patterns are most clinically useful to track (sleep, social activity, medication adherence, etc.)?
 - How long does it typically take to identify meaningful patterns—days, weeks, months?
 - What's the difference between patterns you notice as a clinician vs. what patients recognize themselves?
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Question 6: Delivering Coping Strategies Digitally

"What coping strategies do you teach patients, and do they actually use them during acute distress? What's the gap between knowing a technique and using it?"

Follow-up probes:

- Can apps effectively deliver coping strategies during crisis, or do patients need human support?
 - What makes the difference between a patient using a breathing exercise vs. ignoring it?
 - Would real-time intervention (app detects distress and suggests coping) be clinically helpful or intrusive?
 - What's the role of apps in crisis vs. apps in preventive/maintenance care?
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Question 7: Long-Term App Engagement Patterns

"When you recommend apps to patients, how long do they typically continue using them? What causes them to stop?"

Follow-up probes:

- Do patients tend to abandon apps when they feel better (remission) or when they feel worse (acute episodes)?

- What would make an app valuable enough that patients stick with it long-term?
 - Have you seen patients successfully integrate any apps into their long-term management?
 - What's the difference between apps patients try once vs. apps they rely on for months/years?
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Question 8: Clinical Trust in App-Generated Data

"Do you trust the data patients show you from apps? What makes app-generated data credible or not credible for clinical decision-making?"

Follow-up probes:

- What would make you confident enough in app data to adjust treatment based on it?
 - Do you have concerns about patient data privacy with consumer mental health apps?
 - Would you recommend apps differently if they were integrated with EHR systems?
 - What's the minimum bar for clinical validity in a mental health app?
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Question 10: The Clinically Ideal Digital Tool

"If you could design a digital tool that genuinely helps your MDD/BP1 patients between appointments, what would it do? What would make you confident enough to recommend it?"

Follow-up probes:

- What features would be clinically valuable vs. just "nice to have"?
 - What would make you trust it enough to use the data in treatment decisions?
 - Would you want visibility into patient app data, or should it be patient-controlled?
 - What would make this tool reimbursable or covered by insurance?
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Closing Questions

1. Is there anything about supporting someone with mental illness—or your experiences with apps and technology—that I didn't ask about but you think is essential for me to understand?
2. If you could give one piece of advice to someone designing a mental health app that might involve family members or caregivers, what would it be?
3. Would you and your loved one be interested in testing an early version of an app we're designing and giving feedback together?