Artificial Intelligence and the Front Lines of Suicide Prevention

Dr. Zachary Kaminsky has built an algorithm that identifies suicidal thoughts in real-time while a person is talking. His algorithm analyzes speech patterns and generic psychological concepts related to suicide. It listens for words and matches these patterns against public data linked to a Twitter server.

“This is identifying only what people are saying. It’s not identifying only the person they are talking to,” said Dr. Kaminsky, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the Royal’s Institute of Mental Health Research (DIMHR).

He says he built the algorithm using Twitter data because it’s completely public. It can parse your conversations almost immediately.

“This tool takes tweets, and it takes whatever people say into a number. It asks, ‘How long is this tweet? What’s the likelihood someone is expressing a site of concern? What’s the risk score?’”

So far, Dr. Kaminsky’s pilot study has successfully identified 89 percent of people who would begin to express explicit suicidal ideas weeks — even months — before an attempt happened, and his precision rate continues to rise as the tool refines and tests the algorithm.

While the tool still requires further validation and studies to validate the best way to use it — its potential is promising.

“Its tools work very, very well — and we think they’re working,” said Dr. Kaminsky.

Cognitive Virtual Reality Helps Improve Real-World Cognitive Performance

The ability of virtual reality (VR) to align with the human mind makes it possible for us to experience almost anything, anywhere, has captured the interest of Dr. Synthia Guimond, who is exploring it as a tool for cog-

Research in the digital age

Exciting research at The Royal is leveraging advanced technologies to improve mental health treatment, early intervention and prevention.

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doi: 10.1002/ppmg.27379

Gender differences and the brain

Understanding male versus female brain biology to improve women’s mental health

When it comes to women's mental health, it's not just the brain — but new research that centers on sex differences between men and women could help to bridge this gap.

Understanding how improvements could be made to brain health is critical. "Lifestyle factors, especially environmental factors, can contribute to sex differences in the brain — but also those differences may arise as a result of neurobiological differences," says Dr. Natalia Jaworska, an assistant professor at the Department of Clinical Psychiatry at the University of Toronto.

Research shows that employment is an essential part of the recovery process for individuals with mental illness. Work-related responsibilities of some of the antidepressant medications for men and women without really thinking about whether it’s the right approach for both sexes.

The greater prevalence rate of certain mental illnesses among women — and the fact that females have a higher likelihood of adverse reactions to certain kinds of drugs — Dr. Jaworska’s latest research is taking important first steps toward understanding the gender gap in developing treatment interventions that are more individualized.

Serge, a client at BMHC, has been part of the vocational car wash program at the Brockville Mental Health Centre for almost three years. "I feel the car wash program represents us well in the community, helping to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness by seeing people who are involved in the car wash doing a good job, things like time management, communication and how to be a dependable member of a team," says Serge.

If we can better understand the balance between the female and male brain, we’re recycling 40 healthy females to complete two distinct tasks (a visual-spatial identification task, as well as when participants complete two distinct tasks (a visual-spatial identification task, which makes workers have to consider two processes at once as well as the sex and gender differences in the brain.

"We’re in this place where we’ve been prescribing the same forms of antidepressant medications for males and females without really thinking about whether it’s the right approach for both sexes."

"If we can better understand the essence of the female versus male brain — including how certain treatments affect particular brain circuits, or how particular areas of the brain interact with certain hormones — we can consider treatment options in a more personalized way."

To address this, Dr. Jaworska is currently investigating the role of sex hormones and the structural and functional similarities and differences between the male and female brain.

She is recruiting 40 healthy females (i.e., onset age) who are men and who have a history of depression generally experience a greater number of specific co-morbid mental disorders and bulimia.

Jaworska. Specifically, she is exploring the role of specific medications and doses" that sex-based gaps in treatment interventions aimed at women.

Serge says he’s different from the "old" Serge, whose life took a turn after a road trip. "I feel the car wash program has contributed to my independence and the structural and functional similarities and differences between the male and female brain. This is recycling 40 healthy males and 40 healthy females to study which will be asking about stress hormones only 85 per cent of patients, and give us a more nuanced view of how we should approach individuals with mental health differences," she says.

"This is something that has not been adequately assessed in men, and it could really help to move the yardstick further for women's mental health."

Specifically, she is exploring whether it’s the right approach for both sexes.

Dr. Jaworska adds that the impact of understanding the interaction sex hormones and the medications they are prescribed to is critical for improving drug therapies for women.

For instance, by better understanding the interaction sex hormones with brain structures in females during emotional processing, we may also eventually be able to better tailor cognitive interventions and/or psychosocial therapies.

Understanding differences and similarities between the sexes can better inform our management of patients, and give us a more nuanced view of how we should approach individuals with mental health differences," she says.

She speaks at length about the importance of considering sex differences in the brain. "When it comes to women's mental health, it's not just the brain — but new research that centers on sex differences between men and women could help to bridge this gap."

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For instance, by better understanding the interaction sex hormones with brain structures in females during emotional processing, we may also eventually be able to better tailor cognitive interventions and/or psychosocial therapies.
Delane McFarlane, a long-standing volunteer and past Chair of the Client Advisory Council at The Royal, with Mitchell Bellman, President and CEO of the Ottawa Construction Association. Through various sponsorships and community involvement, we believe in helping and making a difference together, to reduce the stigma around mental health in our local communities. Through part-nerships, technology, research and care, we can do better for people and families who need our help. A grateful corporation: Ottawa Construction Association

Making a difference together

At BMO, we are committed to advancing health and wellness in our local communities. Through various donations, sponsorships and community involvement, we believe in helping and making a difference together, to reduce the stigma around mental health in Canada. BMO is proud to support The Royal Ottawa Foundation for Mental Health.
Psychiatric outreach team reaching Ottawa’s homeless

“I’m not here to give you any advice.” It’s one of the first things Steve Walsh says when he sits down with a client.

Walsh is a psychiatric outreach nurse, and the person he’s talking to is typically homeless or marginally housed and dealing with severe mental health issues, so this statement often comes as a surprise.

“Look, you’re here. You’ve made it all this way; we’re about to talk about, so you’ve obviously got lots of strength. I’m here to listen to you very carefully, and in some conversations and try to get out of you what you think you need,” he says.

Members of The Royal’s Psychiatric Outreach Team are working in dozens of organizations across the city in any given week. They’re working with shelters, drop-ins, community health centres, family resource centres, Indigenous service providers and social housing.

It’s a team of 30, comprised of nurses and social workers, serving the mental health needs of people who are homeless or marginally housed. Walsh, who has been with The Royal for 25 years, says the key to the Psychiatric Outreach Team’s success is its flexibility.

“People don’t want to feel like they’re being evaluated, and you don’t have the insight to know what they’re thinking,” says Walsh. “They’re there to help people, and sometimes I stop by where I know a client. “Look, you’re here. You’ve made it all this way; we’re about to talk about, so you’ve obviously got lots of strength. I’m here to listen to you very carefully, and in some conversations and try to get out of you what you think you need,” he says.

Walsh says when he sits down with a client.

“We want to help in a way that we can see some real improvement,” adds Jimmy Georgiou, co-president of Astro Design. “This new kitchen will help those clients prepare for when they are discharged from The Royal. We believe that the impact and difference this new kitchen space will have on them is huge.”

Formerly known as Sunshine Bakery, the service was recently rebranded as #Bakeology (Baking + Psychology + Baking). Clients prepare baked goods in the kitchen, which is sold in the Winter Garden volunteer café located at The Royal. The skills these clients learn can be transferred to paid employment or volunteer opportunities.

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**My beautiful mind**

**ALLY COOPER**

My whole life I’ve felt different, strange and even wrong. I’ve seen psychiatrists, therapists and counsellors since I was 15 years old. I was misdiagnosed, put on the wrong medication, told to just buck up, stop whining, “like it or you’ll lose it,” (one of my personal favourites). Then I came to The Royal. After my initial intake interview I was diagnosed properly and put on the proper medication. Within six weeks I started to feel better. I wanted to achieve more and do more, and my smarts wasn’t so much.

You know what The Royal really did for me? They made me feel important, special, and most importantly — heard. I truly felt those people cared about me and witnessed them fight for me and my loved ones like each day, not because it’s their job, but because it’s their passion.

Without The Royal I would be lost, not still understanding why I am different and feeling scared and alone, even in the most crowded room.

I realized that you have to put the work in therapy and take your medication, but you also have to commit to lifestyle changes. I learned that doing everything in moderation has affected me in such a good way. I now make a commitment to put myself first. And I like the person I see in the mirror now.

The 2019 edition of the SHoppers LOVE. YOU. Run for Women took place on a clear and wet day in June but that didn’t stop thousands of enthusiastic participants from breaking major records that day.

The awareness raising event takes place in 77 cities across Canada, and Ottawa maintained its place as the top city for fundraising and participation. 3,712 participants registered this year and the combined fundraising effort netted a record breaking $400,000 donation for women’s mental health at The Royal. Top fundraising teams included Support Group of Companies: The Ground Breakers ($31,255), The Mindful Movers ($14,316) and Notorious BLG ($5,945). The event has raised $21.7 million in the past seven years.

“We have awesome support in our community,” says Anne Marie O’Brien, a social worker, and the lead for women’s mental health at The Royal. “People have a really high commitment to the awareness raising event. It’s a demonstration of people’s will and support for women’s mental health.”

O’Brien is grateful to Shoppers Drug Mart for their financial support and for helping change the conversation around mental health.

“You can’t underestimate the power of having Shoppers provide a platform for that,” says O’Brien. “It’s just so empowering and validating leading up to the run.”

She describes having an announcement promoting the event in support of women’s mental health over the loudspeakers at her local Shoppers store.

“It normalizes mental health — it makes it part of the health care landscape. Mental illness is not a secret that is shameful and not spoken — 10 per cent of overall health — rightfully so — and Shoppers really is celebrating this fact.”

Funds raised support women’s mental health through peer support, education, training, and research.

“We’re doing really good work specifically on the power of peer support and recovery and how women benefit from this specific service,” says O’Brien, who describes peer support as an “important and fundamental” part of the recovery process.

“There’s treatment — and treatment is essential to recovery — but recovery is about how you get your life back … It takes an enormous amount of courage to say, ‘OK, I gotta rebuild here.’ But how do you do that? Speaking to other women who have been there, who have done that, is part of that healing process.”

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is one of the peer support groups offered. This evidence-based recovery model was originally developed by Dr. Mary Ellen Copeland and others with lived experience. Participants in this self-directed program develop personal recovery plans based on five core concepts: hope, personal responsibility, self-advocacy, support and education.

We’re committed to creating healthy, vibrant communities.

At Minto, we believe our community involvement and sponsorship is an investment in the health and wellness of the lives we touch and the communities we help to create - leaving the world better off for generations to come.

Minto is proud to support The Royal Ottawa Foundation for Mental Health.

**The race to end the stigma**

**OUTREACH FROM ON**

make a referral to the Psychiatric Outreach Team, who will support the individual, but the team can also help support the agencies by providing information about clients, and connecting them with resources to help them support their clients in the future.

Under the mandate includes helping people who are marginally housed, a term with a broad definition but that can encompass becoming homeless, people in homeless shelters, homeless women in rooming houses or in subsidized housing.

“We’re talking about people who may have a roof over their head but they’re on the edge of losing that roof and they need intervention that focuses on the basic social determinants of health,” Walsh says. He says Caldwell Family Centre, a place that supports women’s mental health, has helped people get access to computers to people living in the area. Almost 150 people took two meals a day at the centre and above the food bank, amounting to around 100 per cent of their nutrition intake that was consumed through the centre.

Leaving Caldwell Family Centre, Walsh runs into a client from years ago who is now a staff person. They are a dynamic duo to say the least.

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**The Royal has extended WRAP to other partners and organizations including Constance Home for Women, and there are plans to bring it to the Elizabeth Perley, Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre, and the Ottawa Native Women’s Association.

In the meantime, O’Brien fields a lot of calls from women looking for help. She wants them to know that if they’re seeking treatment at The Royal they need a referral from their first physician, but that all women — regardless of whether they’re a client at The Royal — are welcome to participate in any of the peer-facilitated groups that are available.

For more information, go to runforwomen.ca.

Walsh shares his assessments by saying he isn’t there to give advice, and he ends them with gratitude.

“Often at the end of conversations, I say, “Thank you for sharing that information with me, because I don’t know that I could have,” he says. “I don’t want to sugarcoat it, but this job goes on as many rewards back. Sometimes the help is as simple as they are just so minimal, and I consider it a privilege that they allow me to work with them.”

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The recovery apartment: A step on the road to independent living

The Royal's new recovery apartment, officially opened in June, has already had clients from The Royal in its Integrated Schizophrenia Recovery Program successfully pass through its doors. In an interview with the Royal’s Integrated Schizophrenia Recovery Program about its new apartment, program manager Le<ref>Len Reynen</ref> explains how the apartment’s unique features can help improve the clients’ quality of life.

The Royal’s Integrated Schizophrenia Recovery Program recovery apartment is an ideal environment for staff to assess clients’ independence and help us understand whether it’s important to get more people on the right path, faster, says <ref>Len Reynen</ref>.

If we’re able to reduce PPD, the best way to think about a biological marker is something that we can measure in the body in a quantitative fashion that is sensitive, specific, and accuracy rate and his new study will build patient groups. Thus, we know that mental illness is not just about the symptoms themselves.

The Royal are showing how biomarkers can help us understand the progression of mental health conditions and how they can be used to monitor treatment response. This evidence is important in New York City to develop a diagnostic test for PPD, which can sometimes be difficult for a parent to recognize. Some cases go undiagnosed, and it is estimated that PPD affects close to 10-20 per cent of new mothers. If new or soon-to-be mothers are made aware of their risk, they might be able to detect the early signs and get help sooner.

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Women for Mental Health at The Royal

KATHARINE COULGARD
Chair, Women for Men’s Mental Health at The Royal

As women, we have the power to effect change. We do it in our families, at our workplaces and in society; as decision makers, influencers and leaders. We know that the power of philanthropy, shared experiences, open conversations and true collaboration are the key drivers for change.

In 2011, a group of like-minded women who wanted to make a difference in the lives of people living with mental illness came together to establish Women for Mental Health at The Royal. This group of twenty-one champions — our founding members — made a commitment to shift attitudes and make real progress in changing the way people think about mental health. Together, these women envision a future where people are more open to share that they have a mental illness.

With a set of new goals in front of us comes an opportunity to refresh the Royal’s Campaign for Mental Health and welcome new members to continue to create change. More importantly, we must prioritize access to mental health care for everyone. I am honored to be leading as Chair, along with the support of our two ardent advocates of Women for Mental Health at The Royal — our Honorary Chair, Sharon Johnston, and our Past Chair, Nancy O’Doherty.

If you are interested in learning more about Women for Mental Health and our membership benefits, please contact Heather Brown at 613-722-6521 ext. 6140 or Heather.Brown@theroyal.ca.

Research in the digital age

RESEARCH FROM C1

Dr. Guimond believes the novelty of VR may help engage individuals in cognitive rehabilitation and lower the stigma that exists around treatment.

“We are generally exposed to VR — we see it in movies and video games. It’s a powerful technology that can be used to help individuals with depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder.”

Dr. Guimond’s research is supported by the Tri-Agency New Frontiers in Research Fund – Exploration Grant and The Royal’s e-RIMH Award.

KEEPING WATCH ON MENTAL HEALTH

What if your smart watch or fitness tracker could alert you when your mental health was at risk?

Dr. Rébecca Robillard, a sleep science specialist at The Royal’s IMHR is exploring how wearable devices and smart phone technologies can help better capture the complexity of mental illness.

Biological, social and behavioural markers are all altered in people with mood disorders, says Dr. Robillard, and they may interact in a way that may be more sensitive to mood disorders than if considered alone. It has been a major challenge in mental health research to link objective measures to subjective moods, but through wearable and smartphone technology, there is the opportunity to track all these.

In the study, participants will wear various monitors that track biological, social and behavioural markers for 2 years. The data could help assess how daily variations in mental health states could have been predicted through wearable devices and smartphone technologies to better capture the complexity of mental illness.

If you are interested in learning more about The Royal’s Campaign for Mental Health and our membership benefits, please contact Heather Brown at 613-722-6521 ext. 6140 or Heather.Brown@theroyal.ca.
Mental illness is worth talking about. YOU are worth talking about.

The first step toward recovery is to learn mental illness and education to students. Here are some tips that may help:

HOW TO GET HELP:

1) Find someone you trust. Say as much or as little as you can afford.
2) It’s OK if you just want someone to listen. Sharing feelings is never wrong and they need to be heard.
3) Remember that you are always welcome to ask for help. There are many options available.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE:

1) Listen without judgment and understand that they may not be able to fully express their thoughts. This is not a diagnosis. They don’t claim what they say. If they disclose something, it is important for you to listen and to support them.
2) Let the person know you care. If you are worried about someone, you must not keep it to yourself. If they are worried about suicide, it is critical to take this seriously.

HELPLINES:

- Ontario’s HealthLine (1-866-686-6868) for more information and resource, visit theroyal.ca.
- The Royal (613-737-2222) for more information and resources, visit theroyal.ca.

The Royal's website, theroyal.ca, has been redesigned to offer a more dynamic and responsive experience. Just hover your phone's camera over the code to go directly to the mental health resource, information, new research, stories of transformation, and more. Find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram! Search for us at @DIFDroyal and use the hashtag #DIFDroyal and #MakeTheNextStep.

For one parent to another, my advice

CYNTHIA CLARK

I am a mom who has chosen to share our story of the hope that it will make everyone feel like they are not alone in the experience of families like my mine. My family and I received support from The Royal in our time of need.

Our journey started 20 years ago when my son Justin, at the young age of 15 years old, was clearly having difficulties. He complained of hearing voices, and this went on for several years. His body ached, food seemed bland, and other senses were heightened. We knew something was wrong and sought help from many others, auditory and easily frustrated. Many tasks and visits to experienced doctors were made, and we are not sure if we could have done it without the support of The Royal.

This was a difficult journey for my family, and our family was challenged for our son to return to school and keep up with the rest of the class. We were worried about what the future might hold, so we struggled with our struggles with medication trials, side effects and the slow recovery. We were worried about what the future might hold. We had a lot of patience, love, and support. In the end, we decided to continue college, find meaningful work and support and love from a long-term relationship. While still in college, he became involved in a high school mental health awareness and education program, that has been a key role in helping to support our family. Our journey has been filled with challenges and successes, but we have learned that understanding will lead to a greater understanding.

Our story is one of hope. Over the years, I have shared that hope with many struggling families. As a founding member of Parents’ Lifeline of Eastern Ontario (PLEO), I have heard countless heartbreak stories from parents who didn’t understand how to help their child, where to go for services, how to deal with the challenges of stigma and how to find support for themselves. These families desperately need answers. If you need to talk, or if you know someone who needs help, please reach out. You are not alone. Together, we can make a difference.

For more information and resources, visit theroyal.ca.