

Daiki Takigawa, COO, Emol
“emol [Mental Health Support AI]”

‘emol’ is a startup company that provides mental healthcare support via AI.

There are many programs that offer support for patients with mental health care but unfortunately, many do not receive proper care. The consultation rate for people with Mood disorders, such as depression, is as low as 38%. Over 60% of those do not receive proper care. In fact, the CEO of emol also had a mental health problem when she was a college student. She too struggled to receive proper care. In addition, according to their study, 70% of people felt that last year was the most stressful and anxiety ridden year due to the pandemic. 82% of those stated that they would love using AI robots rather than humans for mental health support. Until now, mental health care was usually done by humans. But from now on, we believe that AI based mental health care will become mainstream.

The first step in using emol is to talk to it whenever users feel bad or emotional. Users can record the emotions that they feel at the time. The program will also have users do one session a day, then lecture them via chat. The program includes content such as deep breathing, exercise, audio exercise, learning through comics, etc.

[Why emol?]

emol has been downloaded by about 270,000 users so far without the use of advertisements. It’s only available on iOS but we will be released on Android this fall. The strength of emol is that it is user friendly and R&D based. Mental health care apps in Japan are polarized into two categories. Fun-focused Apps that are easy to use but do not show care effects. Care-focused Apps that have evidence based effects, but are difficult to use and do not attract users. emol is able to cover both of them. One of the main reasons why emol is a good UX is due to the intervention of AI characters that are loved by users. In a user survey, when asked “What kind of existence does AI have for you?” Nearly 80% of the respondents answered, friends, pets, and family because they feel that AI is a familiar presence. We have succeeded in eliciting their concerns. Another strength of the company is that we are firmly committed to providing value based on evidence. We have created the app’s program by conducting joint research with universities to verify its effectiveness under the supervision of experts. In order to verify the usefulness of the system, we are also conducting demonstration experiments with the local government of Ichihara-city Chiba. After gaining good results, the next plan is to conduct funds or verification experiments in other areas. Our business model is to provide value to consumers through local governments and enterprises. We will create a system where third parties will bear the cost for the user.

[Future Goals]

Currently, we are focusing on the preventive domain, introducing our technology to local governments and companies. And then aim to introduce it to educational institutions. After that, we will aim for approval by the pharmaceutical affairs bureau in the therapeutic area. Hopefully aiming to become the number one mental health service provider in Japan.

[Q & A]

Q.

Mental health is Emerging threat for human being around the world. So in your description, it seems your business model is B to B when you offer the service offer the product, and also you also have the B to C interface with the user. So can you maybe share with us when you know, work with the business partner? What is your value proposition? When you talk with a local government, enterprise, how you position your service and offering.

A.

Right now, Japanese government sees as the mental health health is becoming quite big problem trying to support a company like us to help mental health care. emol is working with the government and local government to improve the mental health.

Q.

Maybe in your future framing of the value proposition, you can include some detailed qualitative and quantitative outcome, how you improve the overall mental house by reducing the cost by improving the quality. That will make your company value purchase proposition more compelling.

Q.

最終的には医療機器としての承認を取りに行くということによろしいでしょうか？

A.

まずは予防の市場からです。今、実証実験など自治体と組んで取り組んでいます。予防領域でしっかりデータ収集してから、その後、他の企業さまと一緒に治療領域、つまり、薬事承認や医療機器承認の方に、事業展開としていく予定です。

Q.

そこまで何年くらいかかりそうですか？

A.

動き始めているという意味ではもう来年度から、承認まで数年かかると考えています。

Q.

医者でなければ医業として成立しないと言う法律があります。将来ビジネスが進むと医師の代用になり得るのでは懸念しますが、いかがですか？

A.

あくまで今は予防領域であり、最新の注意を払い治療にならないよう事業を営んでいます。将来、治療領域に入ってもおそらく emol 単体での治療効果を得るのは難しいので、医師や製薬会社と連携した複合的な効果を目指して薬事承認などに進むことを想定しています。

Q.

市原市でのトライアルの時についての質問です。どのくらいの頻度でどういう介入を行いましたか？コントロールとかプラセボなどの統計的な比較をされましたか？

A.

1日1回最短14日間というプログラムです。emolを使用した群とそうでない群で分かれていただいて実施しました。ダミーのプラセボアプリは使用していません。