

**Poster Number: W4**

## **Smartphone Access and Well-Being in Hospitalized Adolescents**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Adolescents hospitalized for mental health and medical stabilization frequently retain access to personal smartphones. While devices may support coping, autonomy, and social connection, unstructured or excessive use has been associated with sleep disruption, emotional dysregulation, and reduced engagement in treatment. Inpatient practices regarding smartphone access vary widely, and evidence-based guidance remains limited, particularly during prolonged hospitalizations such as nutritional rehabilitation. As one of the largest adolescent medical stabilization units for malnutrition in the country, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) Adolescent Unit at King of Prussia Hospital (KOPH) provides prolonged inpatient care through a robust multidisciplinary team, making adolescent well-being during extended admissions a clinical priority.

**Purpose:** This exploratory project aimed to describe smartphone access practices among hospitalized adolescents, summarize available evidence related to smartphone restriction and adolescent well-being, and describe observed trends in treatment participation following implementation of structured, in-person therapeutic engagement strategies.

**Methods:** A focused literature review was conducted and appraised using the Fuld Evidence Hierarchy. In parallel, a six-month descriptive observational review was completed among adolescents admitted to a Nutritional Rehabilitation Pathway (NRP) who retained unrestricted smartphone access throughout hospitalization. Treatment compliance was tracked using an Excel-based observation log. Compliance was defined as participation in daily NRP therapeutic and nutritional activities. The maximum daily census was 12 patients. This project was exploratory and descriptive; no validated behavioral scales, staff workload metrics, or statistical analyses were conducted.

**Results:** The literature demonstrated mixed effects of smartphone use on adolescent well-being, with outcomes dependent on clinical context, structure, and individual vulnerability. No strong evidence supported mandatory smartphone deprivation, and several inpatient studies reported emotional distress associated with restriction. In clinical practice, unrestricted smartphone access was maintained while structured, developmentally appropriate engagement

opportunities were progressively introduced, including group therapy, art therapy, music therapy, pet therapy, and supervised peer engagement spaces. Over the six-month period, descriptive trends showed increased participation in daily NRP activities, with compliance improving from approximately 50% at baseline to 80% post-intervention (30% absolute increase). Additional observational trends included increased peer interaction, fewer behavioral escalations, and more manageable staff workload during prolonged admissions.

**Conclusion:** In this exploratory project, unrestricted smartphone access paired with structured therapeutic engagement was associated with improved observed participation in inpatient nutritional rehabilitation activities. Findings suggest that adolescent well-being during prolonged hospitalization may be better supported through intentional engagement strategies rather than smartphone restriction alone. Further evaluative research is needed to develop standardized, evidence-informed guidelines for smartphone use in inpatient adolescent care.

### **IRB Statement**

This project was a descriptive practice review using non-experimental observational data. Institutional review requirements were reviewed in accordance with the CHOP policy. Formal IRB approval was not required.

### **Funding**

No external funding was received for this project.

### **Keywords**

Adolescent Health; Inpatient Psychiatry; Smartphone Use; Therapeutic Engagement; Nutritional Rehabilitation

### **References**

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