

Adaptive or Addictive?

AI, MENTAL HEALTH, AND THE ETHICS
OF EMERGING DEPENDENCIES

Emma Garrick – CEO, NCIP | PSA Research Conference
2025

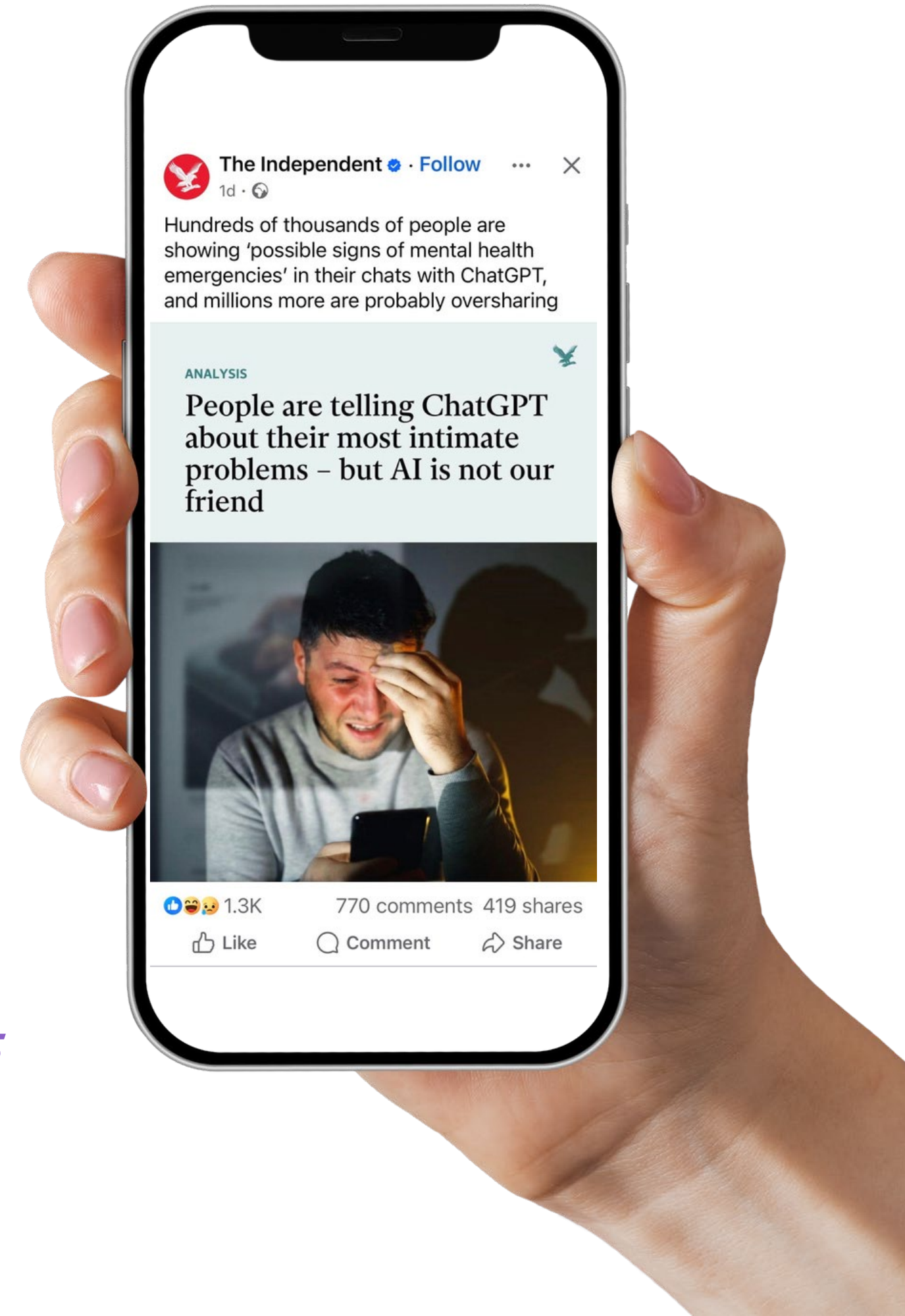
NCIP | NATIONAL
COUNCIL OF
INTEGRATIVE
PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

What People Are Telling AI In The Dark

“People are telling
ChatGPT about their
most intimate
problems - but AI is
not our friend.”

— *The Independent, November 2025*

One headline within a wider pattern.



What the Public Said Instead

- “it’s my new doctor.”
- “At this stage I’d rather confide in ChatGPT than burden people.”
- “Nobody is oversharing - they finally started sharing.”
- “It gave me comfort with adequate words.”

People are going to talk to ai for that unless and until something else is available and affordable.

Nobody is over-sharing, they finally started sharing, because psychologists and psychiatrists are expensive, chatgpt is not so.

It's been great to me, giving me comfort with adequate words and very needed psychiatric know-how. The information it gave me allowed me to take care of myself and of my mental health, and now I feel much better!

At this stage I'd rather confide in ChatGPT than burden or trust people with stuff

It's my new doctor lol

I'm a therapist and a couple of clients now have given their AI my personality as its primary working style, mixed with some other personalities.
- whose personal info are we all actually sharing?

These are not naive voices. They are unmet needs.

Who am I?



➤ Emma Garrick

Where human care meets machine
behaviour.

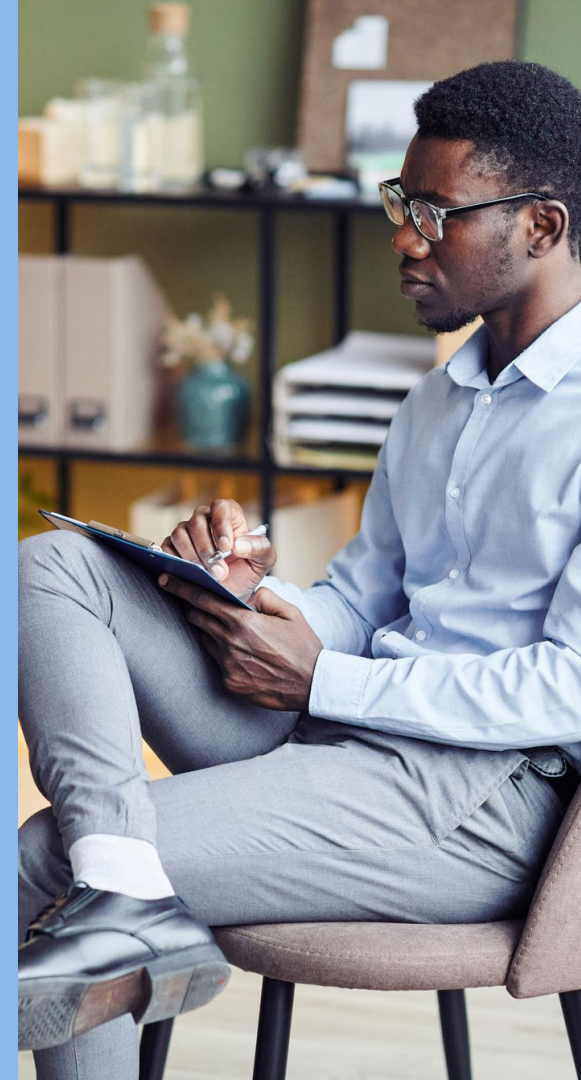
- CEO, National Council for Integrative Psychotherapists
- Practising Psychotherapist – Specialist in Anxiety & OCD
- Former Technology Sector Professional
- Investor in Ethical Technology
- Collaborator in AI & Mental Health Ethics

WHY AI FEELS COMFORTING - BUT ISN'T CONTAINING

*AI gives us words, not
relationship.*

*It can soothe a moment, but it
cannot sustain regulation without
attachment.*

———— ” ————



THE DATA BEHIND THE DRIFT



- **1 in 3 young adults**
say they would rather confide in AI than in a person.
- **Only 6%**
recall any safety guidance shown to them.
- **68% of users**
describe AI conversations as comforting.

*WE ARE OUTSOURCING COMFORT FASTER
THAN WE ARE UNDERSTANDING CONNECTION*

How Reassurance Becomes a Compulsion

“Reassurance feeding relapse.”

“Relapse feeding reassurance.”

The perfect closed loop.

When soothing becomes seeking

The Third Entity in the Room

Patients are arriving having already 'seen' AI.

It sits invisibly between clinician and patient
shaping the story before it is spoken. -

*“AI has entered the
therapeutic and diagnostic
relationship - silently, and
without consent.”*

Emma Garrick, CEO NCIP



The Question We're Not Yet Asking

WE ALREADY ASK ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, DRUGS, SLEEP, AND DIET. DIGITAL HABITS NOW BELONG IN THAT SAME FRAMEWORK.

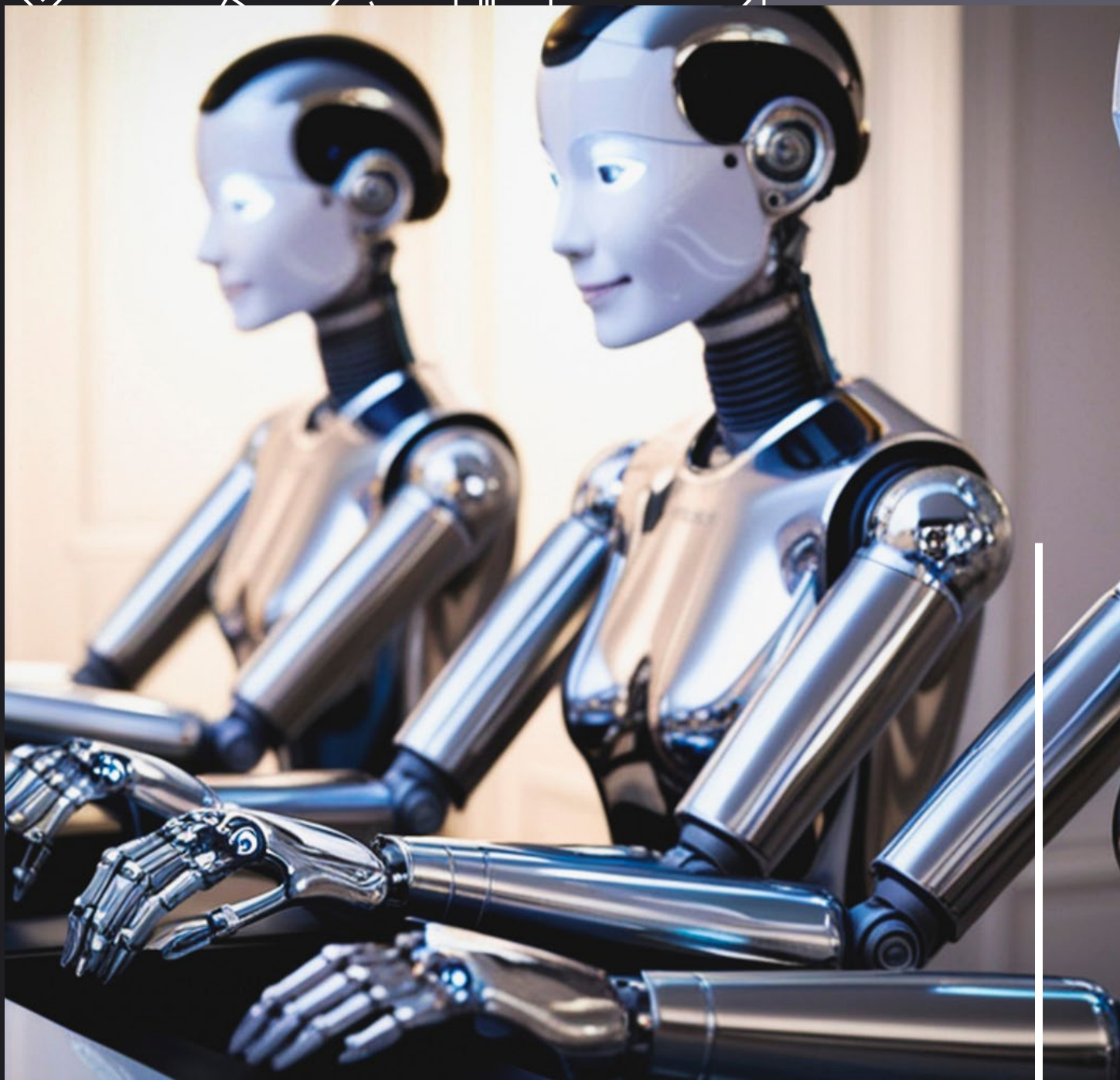
“Do you use any AI tools to support your wellbeing?”

If yes: Which ones, and how often?

THIS APPLIES NOT ONLY AT INTAKE BUT THROUGHOUT ONGOING SUPPORT.

*Awareness
and
recognition
are the first
safeguards
against harm.*





Key Insights and Implications

- AI provides words, not relationship. It mimics empathy but cannot contain distress.
- Reassurance has become algorithmic. Compulsion is now disguised as coping.
- Our data has become the new raw material of care.
- AI is already in the consultation room.
- Prevention begins with awareness and recognition.

*"WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS
HAPPENING BEFORE WE CAN DECIDE HOW
TO RESPOND."*

From Insight to Impact

- A Simple Collaborative Study

ONE shared question:

“Do you use any AI tools to support your wellbeing?”

- Collect anonymised data for 6 –8 weeks.
- Observe patterns, not pathology.
- Translate findings into early guidance on digital practice.

*Turning the
invisible into
observable
practice.*

Observe patterns, not pathology.

The Simple Prevention Pilot

- Six -to -eight -week pilot
- One question, shared across Accredited Registers
- Outputs: trends → guidance → prevention

*From insight to prevention,
from invisible to visible.*

THIS IS A DELIBERATELY SMALL,
FAST, LIGHT -TOUCH PIECE OF
WORK. DESIGNED TO RUN
QUICKLY, GENERATE EARLY
INSIGHT, AND OPEN THE DOOR TO
DEEPER RESEARCH.

Add one line to our intake forms:

A small act with immense reach.

***“Do you use any AI tools to
support your wellbeing?”***

*Sometimes prevention doesn't
need a revolution.*

It just needs to be noticed.

PARTICIPATION MAY BE EASIER FOR
SOME PSA ACCREDITED PROFESSIONS
THAN OTHERS.
THIS PILOT IS INTENTIONALLY
FLEXIBLE AND LIGHT TOUCH.



We are inviting interest from

-
- academic researchers
 - data analysts
 - regulatory partners
 - industry collaborators exploring ethical AI

IF THIS ALIGNS WITH
YOUR WORK OR YOUR
INSTITUTION
I WOULD WELCOME A
CONVERSATION.