

A Web Application to Increase Interest in Treatment Among Problem Drinkers

Daniel Z. Lieberman, MD, Sheela Kadekar, MD, Suena W. Huang, MD, Melissa Lausin, BS
George Washington University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

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Problem: Access to treatment for substance abuse disorders is limited, and practical strategies are needed to expand opportunities for individuals to receive effective interventions.

Approach: Can an automated, online program reach a hidden population of alcohol abusers who are not served by currently available treatment programs, and increase their interest in treatment?

Objective

Recent studies have shown that use of information technology can improve access to care, particularly in the alcohol-abusing population. These systems are cost-effective and less stigmatizing than traditional clinics. Additionally, online interventions reach a hidden population of non-treatment seekers. The objective of this study was to evaluate whether an online motivational intervention would increase the level of interest in treatment in currently untreated individuals with drinking problems.

Background

- While alcoholism is a major public health problem, one of the greatest challenges of alcohol abuse treatment is engaging patients in treatment.
- Better ways of facilitating patient enrollment in treatment programs are needed.
- Obstacles to treatment engagement include:
 - Lack insight into the problem.
 - Desire to continue drinking despite adverse consequences.
 - Stigma associated with alcohol treatment.
 - Fear of criticism or condemnation.
- Individuals with alcohol-use problems who do not access currently available treatment represent a hidden, untreated population.
- Can the easy accessibility of an internet program help reach this population, and increase interest in treatment?

Methods

- An interactive online application, based on Miller's "Drinkers' Checkup," was developed, designed to increase motivation for change.
- The target population was individuals with significant drinking problems who were not receiving treatment.
- Level of interest in four different modalities was measured pre- and post-intervention. The modalities were 1) Individual therapy, 2) group therapy, 3) Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship and , 4) medication management.
- Interest was measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from (1) not at all interested to (5) very interested.



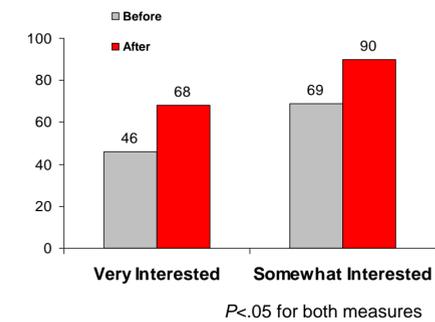
Results

- Prior to the intervention, 19% of the 244 participants (n=46) reported being "very interested" (5/5 on the Likert scale) in at least one modality.
- After the intervention, 28% of individuals (n=68) described themselves as "very interested" ($P=.02$).
- Participants became more focused on a specific modality following the intervention: Individuals showed higher levels of interest in their top choice and lower levels of interest in the other three choices.

Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Participants

N	244
Percent female	51%
Average age in years (SD)	40 (11.6)
Unemployed	11%
Age of first drink (SD)	16 (4.3)
Age of onset of problem drinking (SD)	26 (12.8)
Father with a drinking problem	31%
First degree relative with a drinking problem	50%
Drinks per week (SD)	32 (24.8)
AUDIT score (SD)	18 (7.5)

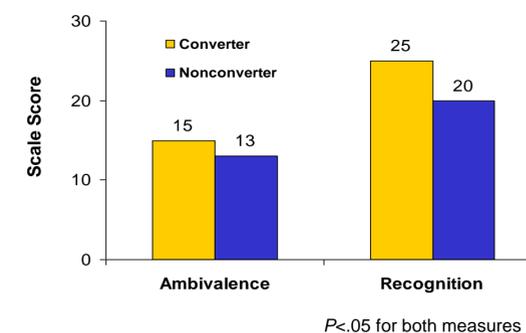
Treatment Interest Before and After Intervention



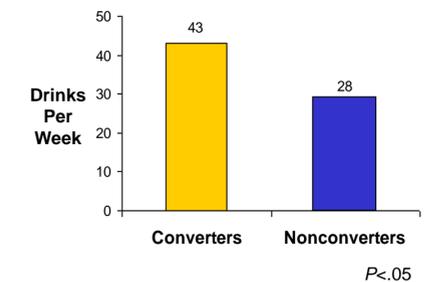
Differences Between Those Who Developed High Levels of Interest and Those Who Did Not

- Part of the intervention involved the administration of the Stages of Change Readiness and Treatment Eagerness Scale (SOCRATES) and the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT).
- SOCRATES measures three attributes related to motivation:
 - Recognition of having a substance use problem
 - Ambivalence about the benefits of use
 - Action taken to change behavior
- AUDIT is a widely used screening instrument that measures high risk and harmful drinking.
- Individuals who entered the study with low levels of treatment interest but developed a high interest after the intervention were significantly different from those who did not convert to high interest.

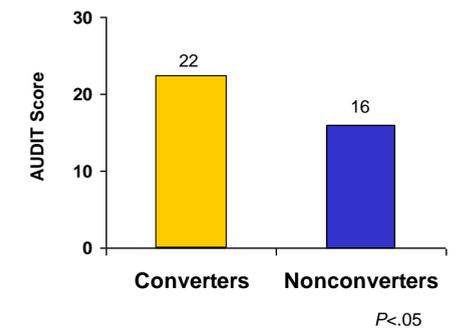
Users who Converted to High Interest in Treatment Had Higher Levels of Ambivalence About Their Drinking, and Greater Recognition of Problems



Users who Converted to High Interest in Treatment Drank More



Users who Converted to High Interest in Treatment Had More Alcohol-Related Pathology



Conclusions

- The greatest challenge in reducing alcohol related morbidity and mortality is converting non-treatment seekers into treatment seekers.
- An online interactive application significantly increased the number of non-treatment seekers who reported they were "very interested" in receiving care.