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Is looking enough? An examination of behavioral change among online treatment seekers and its relationship to treatment entry

Adi Jaffe

Alternatives Addiction Treatment, USA

Aims: To examine the change in behavior over a 6-month time period among individuals seeking SUD treatment online. While motivation for treatment is apparent by seeking alone, no longitudinal assessment of possible changes in actual drug-use and drug-use-related-behavior has been published to date.

Methods: Online treatment seekers were recruited through an online SUD treatment finder after completing online screening, followed by eligibility determination and an online informed consent. Participants were then emailed links to online assessments, delivered via Survey Monkey, to be completed within 24 hours of initial screening and again at one-week, one-month, and six-months following initial screening.

Results: Forty-four participants completed the baseline assessment, presenting broad variability in gender (Female=60%), age ($M=35$, $SD=8.6$), and geography (10 states represented). SUD severity, as measured by the ASSIST, was similar at baseline for participants who entered-treatment throughout the study and those that did not. Follow-up assessments revealed that while no change in drug-use was apparent for non-entrants, significant reductions in drug-use were evident as early as one-month post baseline for participants who entered treatment. Additional measures of recovery similarly revealed that treatment entry was significantly superior to treatment-seeking when it comes to behavioral change.

Conclusions: Our study reveals that motivation to seek is not sufficient to induce behavioral change among individuals struggling with SUD. Specifically, participants who sought, but did not enter, treatment over a period of six-months showed no marked improvement in behavior while those who did enter treatment over that same time period improved significantly. Implications for treatment engagement and marketing will be discussed.

Biography

Adi Jaffe completed his PhD at from The University of California in Los Angeles and Postdoctoral studies from UCLA's Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior. He is the Co-founder and executive Director of research for Alternatives Addiction Treatment, a premier outpatient SUD treatment provider in Beverly Hills, California. He also founded and developed the first algorithm-driven SUD treatment-search tool that was used in the described study. He has published more than a dozen papers in reputed journals and serves on the editorial boards of a number of SUD journals.

adijaffe@gmail.com