



Improving Treatment Outcomes Through Low-Cost Incentives

By adding small incentives to their services, several treatment programs were able to achieve increased patient outcome success.

Incentives Work

The opportunity to win rewards worth as little as \$1 for continued abstinence seems to help motivate patients to stay in therapy and remain drug free.

According to a recent Clinical Trials Study, stimulant abusers who earned prizes by remaining drug free were four times as likely as peers to attain 12 weeks of sobriety. **Prizes for the incentive program increased treatment costs by only \$2.42 per patient day.**

Increasing Successful Outcomes

Mona Sumner, Chief Operations Officer, at Rimrock Foundation, suggests that “many addiction treatment programs face the challenge of high patient dropout rates”. By reinforcing abstinence, we help keep patients interested in counseling services for longer periods, which can keep them off drugs for the long haul.”

Prior studies have found that, no matter how it is achieved, the duration of abstinence during treatment is one of the best predictors of long-term success. “More patients achieve this therapeutic milestone with a boost from incentive programs,” says Ms. Sumner.

Study Design

The researchers randomly assigned 415 treatment-seeking stimulant abusers (please see chart) to one of two conditions: usual care or usual care plus abstinence based incentives for 12 weeks.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS	
Characteristic	Percentage
Ethnicity	
White	42
African-American	35
Hispanic	12
Other	9
Male	44
Unemployed	65
On parole or probation	35
Abuse of other drugs	
Alcohol	42
Marijuana	20
Opioids	9

Usual care consisted of group counseling, although some patients received additional individual and family therapy services. Patients were given urine and breath samples twice weekly.

Each participant in the incentive condition received immediate feedback on his or her samples.

Prizes were conferred immediately and included many options, ranging from toiletries, snacks, and bus tokens to kitchen items.

Summary

Incentive programs add motivational reasons for consumers to attend substance abuse treatment. Many substance abusers are initially ambivalent about the treatment rewards that can often help them stay involved in counseling.

Retaining people in treatment prolongs abstinence, in part, because it gives counselors more time to help patients remain in a drug-free lifestyle. Helping

patients maintain abstinence once they leave residential treatment is a major challenge for all treatment programs, including incentive programs. An incentive program promotes the idea of rewarding people for good behaviors.

Rewarding positive behaviors can reinforce addictions treatment while positive benefits energizes both patients and counselors.

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