

Virtual Group Contingency Management for Stimulant Use: Learnings from a two-year Vancouver Island Pilot Program

Category: Oral Presentation

Abstract Body

Objective: Illicit stimulant use is increasing in North America. Cocaine and methamphetamine rank second and third in involvement with unintentional fatal drug overdoses in British Columbia. Exposure to illicitly produced stimulants predicts higher risk of adverse medical, psychiatric, and socioeconomic outcomes. As 1st line pharmacological treatments remain elusive, contingency management currently offers the best evidence for reduced stimulant use, better treatment retention and quality of life. Contingency management supports participants in recovery-based activities by providing a gift card, voucher, or chance to win a prize in exchange for a specific and measurable behaviour (attending a group, or negative urine drug screen). Implementation barriers to contingency management include cost of prizes and administration, as well as ideological concerns; the COVID-19 pandemic further limited access to in-person groups.

The creation of this group sought to explore whether virtual contingency management is an effective and feasible treatment option for persons who use stimulants.

Methods: Rewarding Recovery, a weekly Island Health zoom-based contingency management group, started in January 2021 to address this treatment gap. Participants across the continuum of care for stimulant use disorders engage in attendance-based rewards, set SMART goals, and practice CBT relapse prevention skills. Attendance and cost data from the first two years of this group are analyzed.

Results: Attendance data from January 2021 to December 2022 shows that group attendance increased while gift card costs have decreased. Two years of anonymous survey data demonstrates that the group is overwhelmingly acceptable to participants. Systems developed for the virtual group have supported delivery of diverse contingency management groups within Island Health.

Conclusion: This initiative is the first known of its kind to use a synchronous, virtual group-based contingency management approach, demonstrating that virtual contingency management is feasible and cost-effective.

Administrative and funding systems developed for the implementation of this group have supported the creation of 10 other groups on Vancouver Island, with goals of further expansion of this service.

Key Words

- Behavioural Interventions
- Caring in Crisis
- COVID-19
- Novel Therapeutics
- Psychological Interventions
- Psychological Models
- Quality Improvement
- Recovery
- Stimulants
- Substance Use Disorder (general)
- Treatment Models/Programs
- Virtual Care

Learning Objective # 1

Participants will be able to describe the principles of contingency management and how this applies to treatments for persons who use stimulants

Learning Objective # 2

Participants will be able to list three barriers to the delivery of contingency management programs and strategies implemented within Island Health to address these barriers

Reference # 1

Petry NM, Alessi SM, Rash CJ, Barry D, Carroll KM. A randomized trial of contingency management reinforcing attendance at treatment: Do duration and timing of reinforcement matter? *J Consult Clin Psychol*. 2018 Oct;86(10):799-809.

Reference # 2

Ronsley C, Nolan S, Knight R, Hayashi K, Klimas J, Walley A, et al. (2020) Treatment of stimulant use disorder: A systematic review of reviews. *PLoS ONE* 15(6): e0234809. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234809>

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