

Future directions for smart recovery

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PRESENTATION 1

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PRESENTATION 4

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Aim: SMART is a peer facilitated group program assisting any problematic behaviours, including use of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, food, shopping, Internet, and others. It is based on cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and motivational tools and techniques. This symposium will describe exciting new research being conducted in collaboration with SMART including embedding this program in AOD treatment services as well as exploring the use of SMART by people who use methamphetamine. The symposium will also describe the innovative and collaborative development of a routine outcome monitoring app. Finally, looking to the future, the symposium will present findings of a qualitative study with young people and SMART facilitators aimed at developing a tailored program for young people.

PRESENTATION 1: EMBEDDING SMART RECOVERY IN AOD TREATMENT IN VICTORIA

Presenting Authors:

Victoria Manning

Introduction: Peer support groups offer a widely available and cost-effective form of aftercare that can amplify and extend treatment effects. The study aimed to explore the feasibility of embedding SMART Recovery (SR) groups in four AOD community-based services, and assess the uptake, benefits and experiences of attending groups from a client, group-facilitator and service manager perspective.

Methods: Four services participated in the pilot, three metropolitan (Melbourne) and one regional service. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining participant responses from a brief post-meeting surveys (n=104) and qualitative interviews (n=16). 8 clinicians and 2 peers received facilitator training with Smart Recovery Australia, and ran weekly in-person meetings for clients until COVID-19 restrictions necessitated a transition to online groups. Between December 2019 and August 2020 the pilot sites delivered 78 groups with 486 attendances (138 in person and 348 online).

Key Findings: Survey responses indicated that almost all participants (96%) reduced their AOD use or maintained abstinence, more than 75% improved psychological health and 88% felt more connected with others after attending. Key themes from the participant qualitative interviews were, motivation for attending, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, connection, adjunctive approach, flexible goal-focussed approach, benefits of being affiliated with an AOD service, the role of facilitators and future considerations (in-person versus online)

Conclusions: The findings suggest it is feasible to incorporate SMART Recovery into AOD treatment and that participants had positive experiences and reported broad benefits on top of their usual treatment. The wider roll out of SR in AOD treatment is highly recommended.

PRESENTATION 2: THE USE OF AUSTRALIAN SMART RECOVERY GROUPS BY PEOPLE WHO USE METHAMPHETAMINE: ANALYSIS OF ROUTINELY-COLLECTED NATIONWIDE DATA

Presenting Authors:

Alison Beck

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Mutual support groups (e.g. SMART Recovery) are an important source of support for people experiencing addictive behaviours. Little is known about the use of mutual support groups by people who use methamphetamine, or the factors that may influence group cohesion.

Methods

This study uses post-group data reported by SMART Recovery facilitators in Australia between 2018 and 2020. Group cohesion was indexed by facilitator ratings of The Group Entitativity measure (GEM-GP). Participant characteristics (gender, age, new or returning group member, voluntary or mandated attendance) and group location (major city vs. regional/remote vs. online) were used to (a) compare methamphetamine and non-methamphetamine related attendances; and (b) explore relationships to group cohesion within groups where the majority attended for methamphetamine.

Key Findings

Methamphetamine use was the second most common reason for attending SMART Recovery groups (n=4929; 22.2% service occasions). Methamphetamine-related service occasions were more likely amongst men, people aged <45 years, returning attendees and regional/rural groups (all $p < .05$). GEM-GP scores were high (signaling strong cohesion), and did not significantly differ according to proportion of participants attending for methamphetamine ($F(1,2) = 0.482, p = .618$). Group cohesion increased with larger group size, proportion of women and proportion of younger people ($F(4, 504) = 11.058, p < .001$).

Discussions and Conclusions

This study improves current understanding of service utilisation by people who use methamphetamine. SMART Recovery groups offer an avenue for supporting a diverse range of people who use methamphetamine, outside the formal treatment system. This provides an important foundation for improving community support options for people who use methamphetamine.

PRESENTATION 3: ROUTINE OUTCOME MONITORING AND FEEDBACK IN SMART RECOVERY: FEASIBILITY AND ACCEPTABILITY OF “SMART TRACK”, AN INNOVATIVE, PURPOSE BUILT SMART PHONE APP

Presenting Authors:

Pete Kelly

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Despite the importance and popularity of mutual support groups, there have been no systematic attempts to implement and evaluate routine outcome monitoring (ROM) in these settings. As trained facilitators lead all SMART Recovery groups, an opportunity exists to embed ROM as a routine component of groups.

Methods

Smart Recovery participants (n=72) were recruited (predominantly from NSW) to a mixed-methods study to explore the feasibility and acceptability of a purpose built ROM and feedback app (“Smart Track”). App development, design and content was guided by qualitative feedback from SMART Recovery participants and best-practice recommendations for app development. Key features of SMART Track include multidimensional assessment and tailored feedback (e.g. personal goals; mental health, addictive behavior(s)); self-management resources; customizable support(s) and personal motivations; and an interactive urge log.

Key Findings

High rates of uptake and weekly use were found. Quality assessment was generally positive. The level of engagement (number, frequency and duration of app visits) varied according to app feature(s). Qualitative data suggests that participants and facilitators were supportive of SMART Track and its role in progress monitoring. Beneficial modifications were identified and actioned.

Discussions and Conclusions

SMART Track represents a promising mechanism for supporting participant self-management of addictive behavior(s). Improved integration into SMART Recovery groups is needed. Efforts to enhance regular completion of outcome measures are also warranted. SMART Track provides the foundation for a novel, person-centered mechanism that service providers, policy makers and researchers could one day use to understand the impact of SMART Recovery.

PRESENTATION 4: SMART FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY TO DEVELOP A TAILORED PROGRAM

Presenting Authors:

Kristen McCarter

Introduction: Despite the overall reduction in AOD use in young people in Australia in recent years, this age-group remain at highest risk of AOD-related harm. Mutual support groups such as SMART play an important role in assisting people with problematic

behaviours and have the potential to be tailored for young people. SMART runs several groups with young people, however to date, has done so without a youth specific program.

Method: This qualitative study engaged key stakeholders in development of a tailored SMART program for young people. One focus group (n=4) with young people and individual interviews (n=6) with SMART facilitators were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Data was analysed thematically.

Key Findings: The semi-structured guide explored several topic areas: setting, barriers and attendance and content and materials. Facilitators described that mixed groups (i.e., young people and adults) were a barrier and that youth-specific groups were needed. The idea of a community of young people helping each other was supported by both facilitators and young people. Both facilitators and young people endorsed the need for SMART groups for young people to address issues beyond AOD and other problematic behaviours including loneliness, time management and school/work stress and relationships.

Discussions and Conclusions: A tailored SMART program for young people represents an opportunity to address current barriers to treatment. The findings of this study provide clear direction for adaptation of the SMART program. This data is an important first step to adapting an evidence-based peer support program for youth.

Discussion Section:

The discussion will focus on how we can embed SMART within existing treatment services and across different populations including considerations for new and further opportunities. Those attending the symposia will gain knowledge on:

- The basic principles of SMART and how the program looks across different settings and populations
- the use of a routine outcome monitoring app that is available now for use in conjunction with SMART groups
- how AOD services might embed SMART groups
- important considerations for running SMART groups with young people

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