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PATTERN OF CRAVING RESPONSE AMONG SMOKERS EXPOSED TO VIRTUAL REALITY

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Introduction: Tobacco craving is an intense desire to smoke. Cue-induced craving is considered the main responsible for relapse after smoking cessation. Cue Exposure Treatment (CET) consists of controlled and repeated exposure to stimuli associated with substance use in order to reduce craving associated.

Objective: To analyze the pattern of craving response of smokers exposed to Virtual Reality environments.

Methods: Forty-six smokers were exposed randomly to complex virtual scenes of 6 minutes long duration with smoking related cues that reproduce typical situations where people use to smokes. Craving was assessed before each exposure and 6 times during navigation with a visual analogic scale. For this secondary analysis the evolution of craving response were explored for the environments that produced the most and the least craving responses.

Results: In the environment that produced the highest craving level, the pattern of response remains similar after the second assessment during the exposure, that is, after two minutes. For the environment that trigger the lowest levels, the responses gradually increased during the exposure and the highest level appeared in the last craving assessment, after 6 minutes.

Conclusions: This study has several implications. In the first place, virtual reality environments are able to elicit craving. In the second, we found that different patterns of craving response exist in response to VR environments. Furthermore, the results obtained in the present study may be useful for cessation programs that include CET, in which is it necessary to know the pattern of desire during the exposure.