

## **P-92 - AVATAR BASED RECOVERY PLATFORM: NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE TREATMENT OF CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY**

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Substance abuse is a devastating public health problem that can cause adverse health effects and negative life outcomes. Behavioral therapies such as CBT have shown efficacy in treating substance use disorders, but constraints on access and questions of applicability to real-life situations have demonstrated the need for alternative modalities of substance abuse treatment.

Avatar-Based Recovery (ABR) Program is a web-based program consisting of patient and clinical interfaces, web-based assessments, psychoeducational modules, compliance tools, and a virtual reality world for behavioral skills practice and social support. ABR can deliver direct-care services to those whose disability or physical distance limits access to treatment centers. It also provides a convenient, anonymous, less threatening way to explore treatment. ABR employs the principles of VR-based exposure therapy. It works by re-creating natural living environments, giving patients the opportunity to both learn and practice alternative responses to triggering situations.

A pilot study is examining the feasibility and effectiveness of ABR in an opioid addiction treatment clinic. Participants included 40 adults with opioid dependence and were randomly divided into two treatment groups. The control group received treatment as usual (daily methadone administration, once weekly individual counseling, and once weekly support group meetings). The experimental group received daily methadone administration, daily check-ins on cravings and drug use, a weekly psychoeducational module, and an individual VR-assisted therapy session once weekly in lieu of regular drug counseling.

Results of the pilot study will discuss clinical validation of Avatar Based Recovery, relevant qualitative feedback, and future directions of research.