New Study Demonstrates Efficacy of Online Well-Being Program in Preventing Substance Abuse Among Working Adults

Results from OWLS study show that tools to prevent workplace substance abuse are most effective when couched within a resilience or well-being framework; reveals dearth of clinically-tested behavioral health apps and suggests criteria for successfully adapting evidence-based tools for working adults

FORT WORTH, Texas (PRWEB) September 05, 2019 -- OWLS (Organizational Wellness and Learning Systems), a science-based consulting and training service in the area of Integral Organizational Wellness™, today announced new findings of a clinical trial that evaluated the efficacy of evidence-based online technology that helps working adults with potential alcohol or addiction problems, including risks for prescription misuse. Using an online system called ‘iLinkWell™, which was embedded within a wellness behavior support system, participants in the four month-long clinical trial reported feeling less stressed, less apt to misuse prescription drugs, and expressed stronger intentions to reduce alcohol consumption.

Alcohol use is a leading risk factor for disease burden worldwide. The results from a 2018 global study on alcohol risk (assessing 195 locations from 1990 to 2016) found alcohol use accounts for nearly 10% of global deaths among the primary working age (15–49 years). The most recent USDDHS data show that of those suffering from or at high-risk of alcohol disorder and need treatment, less than 7% actually receive any treatment. Other studies show that adult misuse of prescription drugs is on the rise.

“Given the public health need for a reduction of alcohol and substance abuse among working adults, it’s not a big surprise that many ‘harm reduction’ apps are available. What is surprising is that virtually none are clinically tested, evidence-based or designed for long-term use,” said OWLS CEO and founder Dr. Joel Bennett. “The clinical trial demonstrated initial efficacy of tools in changing behaviors and lowering risks. Consistent with our previous 20 years of work, we believe these outcomes are due to couching addiction within a broader wellness effort and, also, the use of an interactive health game built into the iLinkWell™ platform. Participants reported gaining insights or otherwise benefitting from using wellness resources, planning health behaviors, and the lowering of the stigma of help-seeking.”

The OWLS team built the iLinkWell™ program, based on five major criteria that contribute to an effective workplace substance abuse prevention program:

1. Follow guidelines from a previously established evidence-based model: Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (or “SBIRT”)
2. Adopt the Health Action Process Approach, a well-tested approach to health behavior change
3. Incorporate best practices in user design per mHealth literature on behavior change; included self-assessment with feedback, tailored messaging or delivery of content, and email reminders
4. Link users to helping professionals (in the workplace, this is often an Employee Assistance Professional or EAP)
5. Couch intervention within a general wellness framework (such as the Daily Habits Game, an online interactive wellness/health game incorporated in the clinical trial) to support de-stigmatization of abuse and help-seeking.

“Mental health apps are rarely regulated, and it’s a challenge navigating the ever-growing digital marketplace to
find ones that actually work,” said Dr. Stephen Schueller, Executive Director of PsyberGuide, a Project of One Mind and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychological Science at the University of California, Irvine. “The OWLS study is important in advancing our understanding of what makes a mental health app – or, more particularly, digital substance abuse prevention – effective. The criteria OWLS laid out, based on their findings, helps provide a framework to help reach and benefit people who are grappling with these problems.”

PsyberGuide.org is a non-profit project that aims to help people to use technology to live a mentally healthier life. PsyberGuide provides rigorous, unbiased reviews of mental health apps and currently has almost 200 apps reviewed on the App Guide.

For more on the program and the study’s key findings, visit https://psyberguide.org/blog/guest-blog/smartphones-substance-abuse-and-well-beinghelping-working-adults-access-resources/

About OWLS

OWLS’ purpose is to help businesses understand, improve, and maintain the positive feedback system between worker health and total organizational health. Their work is based on scientific research and is adapted to meet each business’s unique set of needs, risks, and current level of wellness. OWLS uses a variety of tools to help, including employee surveys, culture audits, workshops, coaching at all levels (worker to executive), team retreats, design of assessment or performance appraisal systems, and policy development. OWLS’ previous clients include organizations in federal and local governments, Fortune 500, military, hospitality/hotel, healthcare, construction, police and 9-1-1, professional organizations, and higher education.
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