Internet-based treatment options for problem gambling: a review of existing evidence and models

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Outline

- Why consider Internet-based treatments
- Internet therapy
- Online interventions
- Implementation issues
Why consider a new form of treatment?

- The majority of problem gamblers (90-97%) do not engage in treatment
- Annual cost of each pathological gambler = CAD$20,000-$56,000
- Many individuals with gambling problems may benefit from largely self-guided less-intensive treatment interventions
Advantages of online treatment

- User demand
- Increases treatment accessibility, availability and convenience
- Offers privacy and anonymity
- Relevant for at-risk population
- Adapted from existing treatment models
- Fits with stepped-care treatment model
- Cost-effective
- Empirical evaluations
Internet Therapy

- Online self-guided exercises
- Therapist support
- Empirically supported
Norway - www.spillbehandling.no

- 3-month program conducted online with telephone support
- Weekly assignments (CBT-based)
- Online discussion forum
Norway - www.spillbehandling.no

- 2007-2009: 90 clients (86% male, M age=36, M SOGS=11.6), 38 completions, 18 no starts, 11 drop-outs

- Positive changes for gambling thoughts and behaviour, depression, anxiety and concentration

- Positive client feedback
Finland: *Addiction Link*

- Self-help resources & assessments
- Professional support & counselling
- Peer-support & discussion
- Approximately 170 visitors per day, 40,000/month
- 12% of counselling for problem gambling
Germany – Check Your Gambling

www.spielen-mit-verantwortung.de

- Personalised counselling - 4 week program
- Automated self-test & relevant information
- Local help options
Germany – *Check Your Gambling*

- 2007-2009:
  - 197 participants registered (12-15/month)
  - 87% male,
  - mean age=34,
  - 64% first help seeking,
  - 95% pathological gamblers
- 66% completed program
- Feedback: gambling diary, counsellor feedback and online chats sig. helpful
United Kingdom - GamAid

- Chat with online advisors (during service hours)
- Email advice
- Support, not treatment
- Online forums/discussion boards
Australia – Gambling Help Online

- Live counselling 24/7
- Email-based counselling
Australia – *Gambling Help Online*

- Since soft launch 31.8.09
  - 4,209 hits (3,083 unique hits)
  - 197 live counselling requests
  - 28 unique email requests
  - 64% anonymous access
  - 58% contacts outside traditional business hours
  - 47% males
  - 84% gamblers
  - 78% metropolitan
Online interventions

- Internet-based self-help treatment options
- No “gold standard”: structure, components, time-frame
- Evolve based on research & feedback
Components of online interventions

- Registration
  - Allows progress to be tracked
  - Users can be contacted
  - May be anonymous
  - Facilitates research
Components of online interventions

- Tailored normative feedback
  - Stand-alone intervention or first step
  - Increases relevance of information
  - May motivate behavioural change

Cunningham, J.A. et al. (2009)
Components of online interventions

- Tailored content
  - Personalised treatment
  - Tailoring based on age, gender, culture, form of gambling, stage of motivation & change, reasons for gambling
Components of online interventions

- Behavioural tools
  - Monitoring diaries
  - Analysis of behavioural patterns
  - Goal setting
  - Progress tracking
Components of online interventions

- Interactive educational exercises
  - Educational information
  - Cognitive strategies
  - Quizzes
  - Automated feedback
  - Multi-media

www.gambleaware.co.uk
Components of online interventions

- Motivational phases
  - Work with clients at various levels of readiness for change

Overview of Stages of Change*

- **Precontemplation**
  - Client does not recognize the need for change or is not actively considering change.

- **Contemplation**
  - Client recognizes problem and is considering change.

- **Action**
  - Client has initiated change.

- **Maintenance**
  - Client is adjusting to change and is practicing new skills and behaviors to sustain change.

- **Relapse**
  - Client has relapsed to drug use.

Components of online interventions

- Online support groups and forums
  - Adjunct to treatment or maintenance
  - Monitored
  - High traffic flow and activity
Know the Score

- Launched by Responsible Gambling Council
- 109 University & college campuses
- Interactive PG awareness program
  - On-campus staff
  - Website
  - Quiz
  - Facebook
  - Bluetooth texting
  - Blog

Centre for Gambling Education & Research
Check Your Gambling.Net

- Brief automated personalised feedback intervention
- Summary report
Implementation issues

- Internet access
- Client suitability
- Promotion & advertising
- Attrition
- Research
Conclusions

- Growing support for Internet-based treatment
- Successful, accessible, cost-effective
- Providing brief treatment & support for those who would not seek traditional services
- Empirically verifiable
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Thank you

Questions, comments?

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