

## RESEARCH BRIEF

### EVALUATING FEASIBILITY OF A COUNSELOR “TOOLKIT” IN GROUP THERAPY

In this small feasibility study to be followed by more rigorous evaluation, the authors captured the key principles of the evidence-based Decisional Balance construct into a “toolkit” of short, visually appealing, and easy-to-use written and video material for counselors and patients in group therapy sessions. The researchers found widespread acceptance and satisfaction with the toolkit by patients and counselors alike, and continued use by counselors of at least one toolkit component three months after initial exposure. The findings have implications for incorporating complex and sophisticated, empirically supported treatment interventions into actual community based treatment settings with minimal counselor training requirements.

**Background:** The challenges of translating evidence-based practices to real-world clinical conditions are well documented, given the complexity of the practices and the rigor, training, fidelity monitoring and other processes that are often impossible to replicate in actual clinics. If the translational techniques demonstrated in this small feasibility study can be replicated and validated with other empirically supported practices, an important, heretofore absent research-to-practice pathway may be established for treatment of substance use disorders.

**Procedures:** The feasibility of a multi-component Decisional Balance toolkit of resources was assessed with 26 counselors and 210 of their group therapy, substance abuse treatment patients from six community-based programs. Approximately one-half the counselors (54%) were themselves in recovery. Components of the toolkit included:

- ◆ A laminated, two-page clinician guide along with eight-minute Video Clip to orient the counselor to the Motivational Interviewing technique of Decisional Balance.
- ◆ A five-minute instructional video for patients televised at the beginning of the group counseling session to introduce patients to the main principles of Decisional Balance.
- ◆ A one-page, laminated Clinician Process Guide depicting key session components using icons and color coding; providing suggested wording illustrating principles; and suggesting wrap-up options for summarizing the group session.

**Of Interest To:** Addiction treatment providers; policy makers.

**Study Title:** Implementing Evidence-Based Practices in Community Treatment Programs: Feasibility of a Counselor “Toolkit”

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**Major Findings:** Initial counselor/client acceptance and utility was demonstrated in this feasibility study of a toolkit of visually appealing, brief resources capturing essential principles of Decisional Balance.



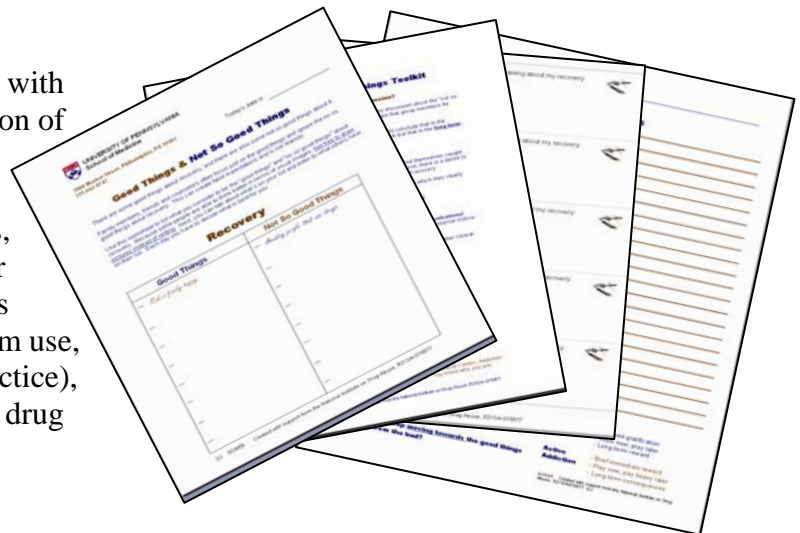
◆ Client worksheets and wallet cards to promote engagement and to help patients retain key points of the session by personalizing concepts to their own situations.

Clients and counselors were asked to complete questionnaires immediately after the group session to assess satisfaction with the toolkit. For the next three months, counselors reported on a monthly basis how often they continued to use of one or more toolkit components.

**Findings:** A significant majority of patients (97%) and all counselors (100%) reported satisfaction with the toolkit session; 84% of patients reported they would like more sessions like it. Three months after the session almost all the counselors (96%) were still using at least one component of the toolkit without prompting. The Clinicians' Guide and Client Worksheets, the most vital components in the perception of the authors, were those most frequently still in use.

Counselors who reported being in recovery reported the Video Clip, Clinicians' Guide, and Client Worksheet as being significantly more useful than counselors not identified as being in recovery. Counselors in recovery were significantly more satisfied with the toolkit session. Neither difference was explained by attained educational level or length of time in the field.

**Limitations:** This was a preliminary feasibility study with small sample sizes, no control groups, and no evaluation of fidelity or reliability of implementing the Decisional Balance construct. Future studies (ongoing as of this writing) will develop and test two Toolkit curriculums, one on Relapse Prevention (six Toolkits) and the other on 12-Step participation (five Toolkits). Those studies will assess utility and satisfaction, along with long-term use, counselor fidelity (how much the toolkits improve practice), and patient outcomes (such as 12-Step attendance and drug use).



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