

Wired for wellness: e-Interventions for addressing college drinking[☆]

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Abstract

In an effort to address problematic drinking among American college students, there has been increasing interest in the use of technology. This article reviews evidence for the efficacy of computer and internet interventions and provides information on five commercially available alcohol education and intervention programs that target college drinkers. Most programs use a mix of educational, skills-based, and motivational strategies to present material. All programs include assessment questions and provide personalized drinking feedback or other information that is customized to each user. Despite limited outcome research, there appear to be a number of advantages to computer and internet programs that focus on alcohol reduction. Future studies will need to determine how to best make use of technology to reach larger numbers of students with an effective, individual approach. © 2005 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Alcohol use has been a persistent problem at many American universities. Approximately two thirds of students drink some alcohol in a given month and more than half of drinkers report at least one heavy episode (O'Malley & Johnston, 2002; Wechsler et al., 2002). This pattern is associated with lower grade point averages, higher rates of intoxicated driving, a greater incidence of violence, and a substantial economic cost to colleges and the community (Hingson, Heeren, Zakocs, Kopstein, & Wechsler, 2002; Hingson, Heeren, Winter, & Wechsler,

2005; Jennison, 2004). In response, colleges have instituted prevention and intervention programs ranging from universal efforts targeting the entire student body (Perkins, 2002; Weitzman, Nelson, Lee, & Wechsler, 2004) to selective programs for students who have already evidenced problems with alcohol (Fromme & Corbin, 2004; Larimer et al., 2001). In this effort, there has been increasing interest in the use of multimedia technology to provide prevention messages. The attraction for those who work in college health settings is the possibility of delivering a low-cost, structured intervention to a large number of students. Indeed, college students are already the most “wired” of all demographic groups: 85% own their own computer and 86% have gone online (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2002). Many students already use the internet to find health information. In a recent survey of 15- to 24-year-olds, two thirds reported that they had received health information online and one quarter sought information about drug or alcohol problems (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001). Students also act upon the information they receive: 70% of health information seekers discuss it with a friend and 40%

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