

The Internet in the Prevention and Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders



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SUMMARY: *The Internet, as the fastest-growing medium, is becoming more affordable for the general population, allowing cheap, fast, and efficient communication in several modalities, such as text, sound, and images. Around two thirds of Internet users in developed countries use the Internet to find information about health problems and their treatment. Therefore, the Internet has a great potential for preventive and therapeutic effects. The review article focuses on the possibility of using the Internet in the treatment and prevention of some alcohol use disorders. Websites focusing on this issue offer four basic types of services: (a) information services, (b) screening and brief interventions, (c) psychotherapy or counselling, and (d) self-help group meetings. The advantages of Internet services are mainly the lower cost of treatment, flexibility of place and time, and the possibility of remaining anonymous and of being in contact with hidden populations such as female or young drinkers. In contrast, the main drawbacks are the lack of visual and auditory cues (making it more difficult to detect certain nuances which are especially important in terms of effective diagnosis and support for compliance with the therapy process) and the risk of fostering social isolation and/or the exacerbation of addictive behaviour on the Internet. Therefore, the Internet seems to be an attractive addition rather than a real alternative to the traditional approach to the prevention and treatment of alcohol use disorders. In particular, its potential lies in its being a relatively inexpensive way to reach out to specific alcohol user groups engaging in harmful alcohol consumption who are not in contact with treatment services.*

KEY WORDS: INTERNET – ALCOHOL – ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS – TREATMENT – ONLINE INTERVENTION

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