

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park

Employees Mandated to Enter Treatment Programs Do As Well As Self-Referrals

A recent study reported that employees who tested positive for a drug (primarily alcohol or marijuana) and were required to enter a substance abuse treatment program improved as much as employees (without a positive drug test) who voluntarily sought treatment through their Employee Assistance Program. Study participants were employees of either a large transportation firm or a city service union in Philadelphia. Addiction Severity Index (ASI) interviews were conducted at the time of treatment admission and at follow-up (six months after treatment discharge). As the table below illustrates, both groups reported significant improvements in five of the seven problem areas measured by the ASI. The authors concluded that “the coercive referral condition did not hinder the chances for successful treatment. In fact, it appears that mandatory referral to treatment and the risk of job loss served as a strong motive for treatment compliance” (p. 127).^a

Selected ASI Mean Composite Scores for Coerced and Self-Referred Treatment Patients at Treatment Admission and Six-Month Follow-Up^b

Problems in Prior 30 Days	Coerced Patients (n=96) ^c		Self-Referred Patients (n=161) ^c	
	Treatment Admission	Six-Month Follow-Up	Treatment Admission	Six-Month Follow-Up
Alcohol Use	.34	.09***	.55	.12***
Drug Use	.09	.02***	.16	.03***
Legal Status	.03	.004*	.07	.01***
Family/Social Relationships	.14	.08**	.23	.13***
Psychiatric Symptoms	.15	.06***	.21	.13***

^aWhile the authors provide some evidence for the accuracy of the ASI results, the possibility remains that both groups underreported their drug use at the six-month follow-up because of potential negative consequences to their employment.

^bComposite scores measure the general severity of a problem during the prior 30 days. Scores range from 0.00 to 1.00 with higher numbers indicating more serious problems.

^cNs vary across items due to missing or refused answers.

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Eli Lawental et al., “Coerced Treatment for Substance Abuse Problems Detected Through Workplace Urine Surveillance: Is it Effective?” *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 1996, 8(1):115-128. For more information, contact Dr. A. Thomas McLellan at 215-823-6095.

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