

# Smart phone app to help addicted offenders to be tested

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Smart phones make phone calls, play music, take pictures and keep track of your appointments. Now, researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison are investigating ways in which smart phone applications can help people deal with a chronic illness such as addiction.

The system they've developed, called Addiction-CHESS (A-CHESS) gives users access to an online peer support group and clinical counselors.

A "[panic button](#)" on the device allows the user to place an immediate call for help with cravings or triggers — people, places and things associated with drug or alcohol use in the past. A GPS feature sends an alert when the user gets near an area of previous drug or alcohol activity. A-CHESS also allows for real-time video counseling. Tools and graphs help the user celebrate milestones in recovery.

In a four-month pilot beginning this month, 30 offenders in the Ayer Concord Drug Court Program (ACDCP) in Massachusetts will test A-CHESS as a treatment tool. Drug courts provide substance abuse treatment to addicted offenders as an alternative to incarceration.

Researchers will measure how much the pilot participants use A-CHESS during the study period, which features they use most frequently, and how their drug or alcohol use compares to that of other drug court participants. The research team will interview the study participants and judges, drug court administrators and substance abuse counselors to get

their feedback and suggestions for improvements to the application.

The ACDCP drug court teams and clients are excited about the pilot, says Hilary Curtis, program director.

"Being able to reach out during times of risk can be a key factor in maintaining sobriety, and this tool can make that call for help much easier," she says.

A-CHESS is one of several technology-based systems developed by the Center for Health Enhancement Systems Studies (CHESS) at UW-Madison. The center creates tools to provide information and support to people with chronic illnesses, whenever and wherever they need it. The A-CHESS project is based on the premise that computer-based support systems can help those suffering from addiction achieve lasting recovery by providing consistent, 24-hour access to information and support.

"Our primary hypothesis is that A-CHESS will improve competence and autonomy, which are important to help individuals succeed in drug court treatment," says David H. Gustafson, principal investigator for the A-CHESS study.

**More information:** For more information about CHESS, visit [www.chess.wisc.edu](http://www.chess.wisc.edu) .

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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