



For immediate release — September 3, 2015

U of L study seeks to find additional treatment for disordered gambling

A University of Lethbridge researcher has launched a study that looks at the addition of contingency management (CM) to standard counselling practices for disordered gambling. CM works by rewarding counselling attendance and abstinence from gambling.

Dr. Darren Christensen, a U of L addictions counselling professor, says contingency management has been used successfully in the treatment of various addictive substances. CM uses motivational incentives, usually vouchers that can be exchanged for retail goods and services, as rewards when a participant performs a target behaviour or withheld when the participant doesn't perform the behaviour.

“Problem gambling is a significant public health concern in Canada, causing harm to not only the gambler, but to his or her family and society at large,” says Christensen. “New treatment approaches are needed as gamblers often refuse to attend treatment and also have high treatment drop-out rates. This study will help us determine if contingency management will improve the overall effectiveness of treatment for disordered gambling.”

CM is based on the premise that problematic gambling develops in association with the regular but variable nature of gambling wins. The CM treatment uses the same approach to reverse these associations. It appears to be very successful but has only been applied once to problematic gambling. With this study, Christensen hopes to provide more evidence regarding its use as an additional treatment for people with disordered gambling.

Christensen is seeking English-speaking research participants who meet the criteria of a diagnosis of disordered gambling, who are 18 to 75 years old and primarily seeking treatment for disordered gambling. The study requires participants to be involved for 14 weeks. Anyone interested in participating is asked to contact Christensen at 403-329-5124.

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