SUD treatment in the context of COVID-19

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Psychological response and needs in a disaster
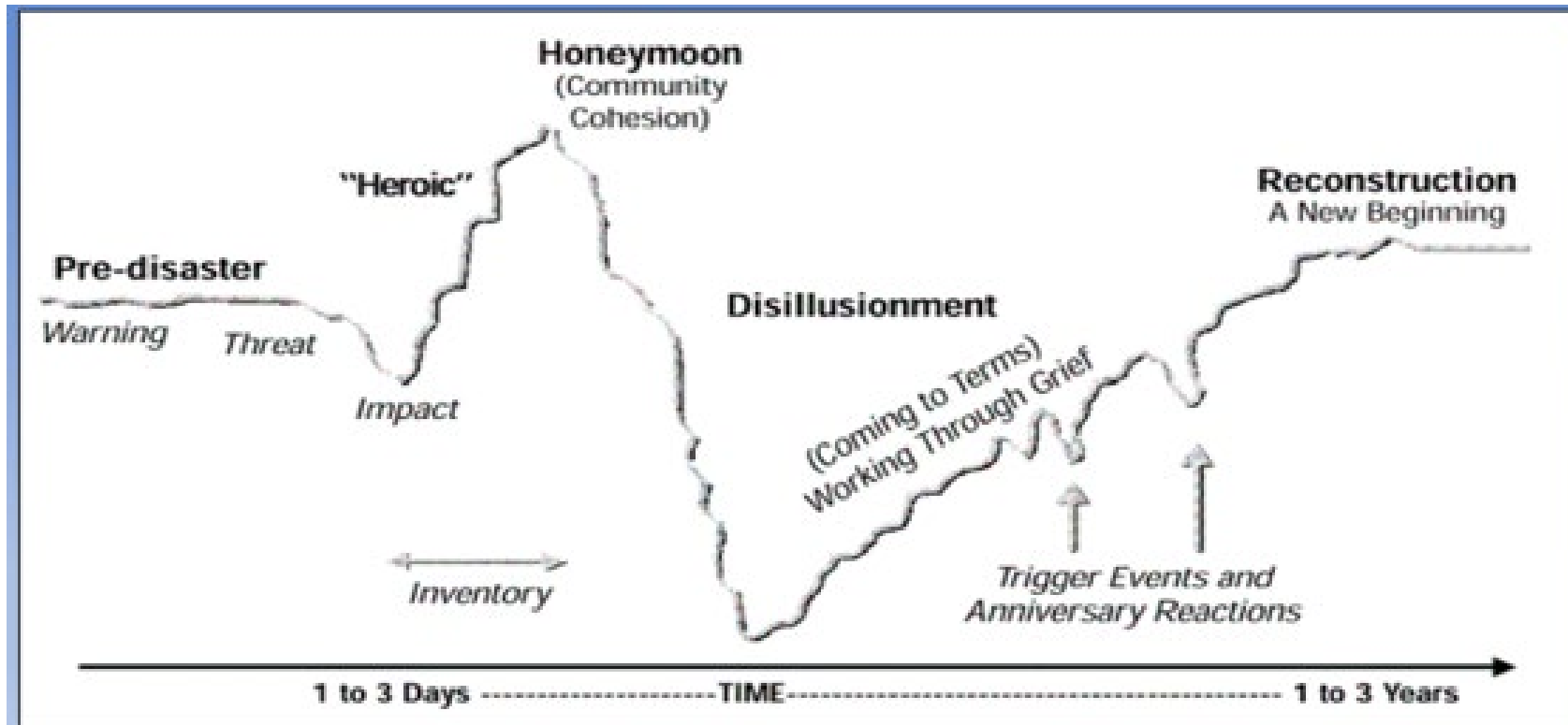
- Provide for basic needs
- Protect from further harm
- Reduce agitation and arousal
- Support those most in distress
- Keep families together and provide social support
- Provide information, foster communication and education
- Orient to available services
- Use effective risk communication techniques

"It's a marathon, not a sprint." –US Agency for International Development office, Sri Lanka, January 2005

Risk factors for post-disaster psychopathology

- Dose of trauma, level of exposure to the event
- Prior exposure to trauma such as disaster
- Prior psychiatric history
- Problems of living prior to disaster/low SES
- Lack of perceived or actual social supports after the trauma
- Presence of secondary stresses
- Female
- Middle age
- Ethnic minority

COVID-19 pandemic effects on SUD treatment

- Barriers to inpatient treatment
- Barriers to regular face-to-face maintenance visits
- Increased stress, risk for setbacks
- Economic stressors, risk of diversion
- Support/recovery groups not meeting (some moving online)
- Increased risk of more severe forms of COVID-19
- COVID-19 maps onto SUD vulnerabilities
- Lockdown policies
- Re-purposing of beds, pharmacies, lab, hospitals/clinics to COVID-19

COVID-19 guidance for OUD treatment programs and clinicians

- Triggers and relapse
  - Plan for additional stress, make a maintenance plan
- Counseling and meetings – look for alternatives to face-to-face meetings
  - Online options include AA Intergroup (http://aa-intergroup.org/) and Smart Recovery (www.smartrecovery.org, click "online community").
  - Do not make medication prescription contingent upon meeting/therapy attendance
- Drug monitoring
  - Identify patient-centered strategies, creative solutions to monitoring

COVID-19 guidance for OUD treatment programs and clinicians

- Access to medications/interim medications
  - Continuous access even if quarantined/isolated
  - Avoid universal monitoring
  - Telehealth options
  - Medication delivery option
  - Consider take home doses as appropriate (despite diversion risks), especially in cases of COVID infection/exposure
  - Shifting to longer acting medications if possible to reduce visits
  - Backup system (3-4 providers deep) for your patients if you become unavailable, remote medical access
- Smoking and vaping
- Travel
- Age and Other Medical Conditions

Connections Mobile App

In the setting of COVID-19, social distancing measures may impact access to care including social support systems (e.g., through 12-step programs) that help people struggling with addictions

The Addiction Policy Forum has advanced its roll out of an empirically supported Connections Mobile App (A-CHESS – Addiction Comprehensive Health Enhancement Support System) that may assist people to combat addictions during the COVID-19 pandemic

The app "supports patients in recovery by offering anonymous, prosocial engagement with others in recovery, connections to their care team, and digital cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)," among other features.

"Through the Connections App, the Addiction Policy Forum will supply trained counselors with a Telehealth strategy to help individuals with SUD maintain recovery. Training will occur daily from 9:00 AM to 10:00 PM. Both companies [APF and CHESS Health] will collaborate to moderate online discussion groups for individuals to support one another and share recovery strategies in a safe, anonymous setting."

Over 900 people signed up in first 24 hours of operation

eRecovery: Functionality
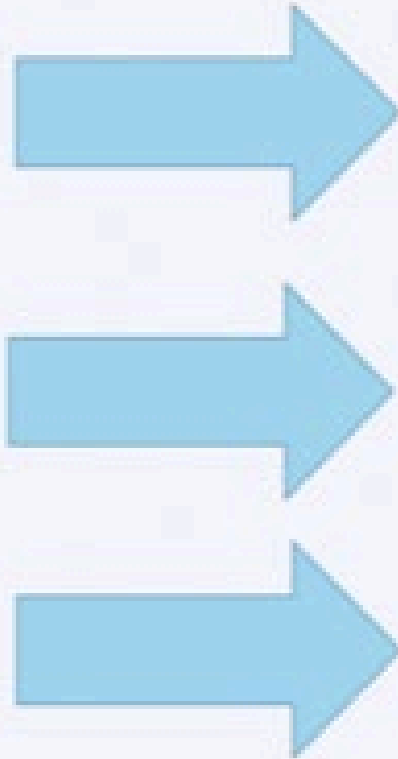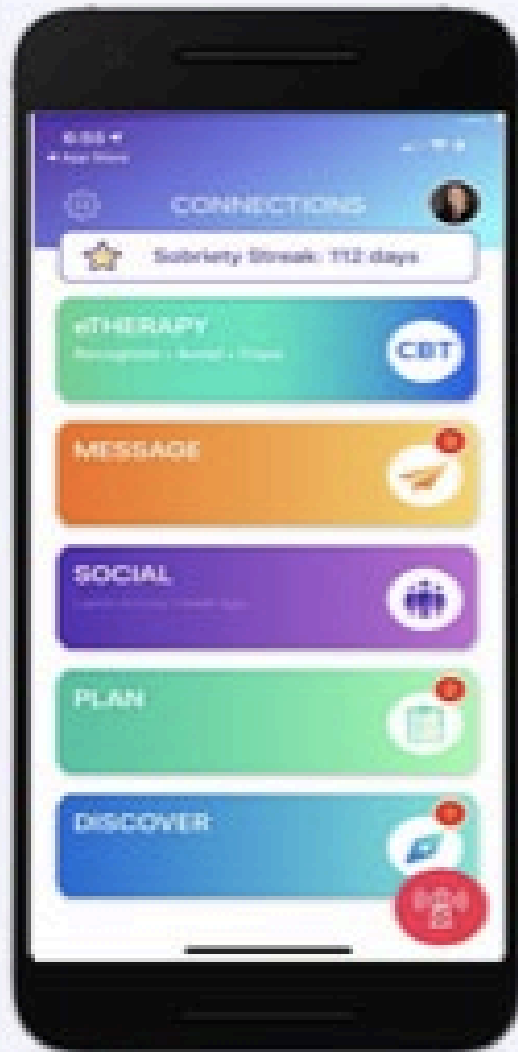
- Daily check-ins
- Recovery support through discussion groups and messaging
- Secure contact with counselors
- Care plan reminders for medications and appointments
- Goals, journals, and weekly surveys
- Recovery help button
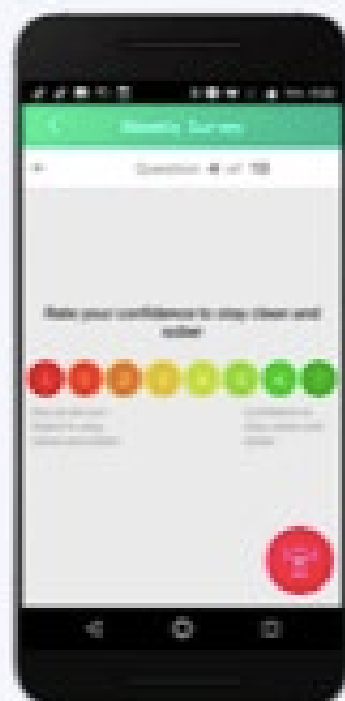- Audio, video and written content to support recovery

Connections: Functionality

Weekly Brief Addiction Monitor (BAM) Survey

Threshold Questions
- Have you used drugs or alcohol in the last 7 days?

Protective Questions
- Rate your involvement with work, school, volunteering
- Rate amount of time with supportive family & friends
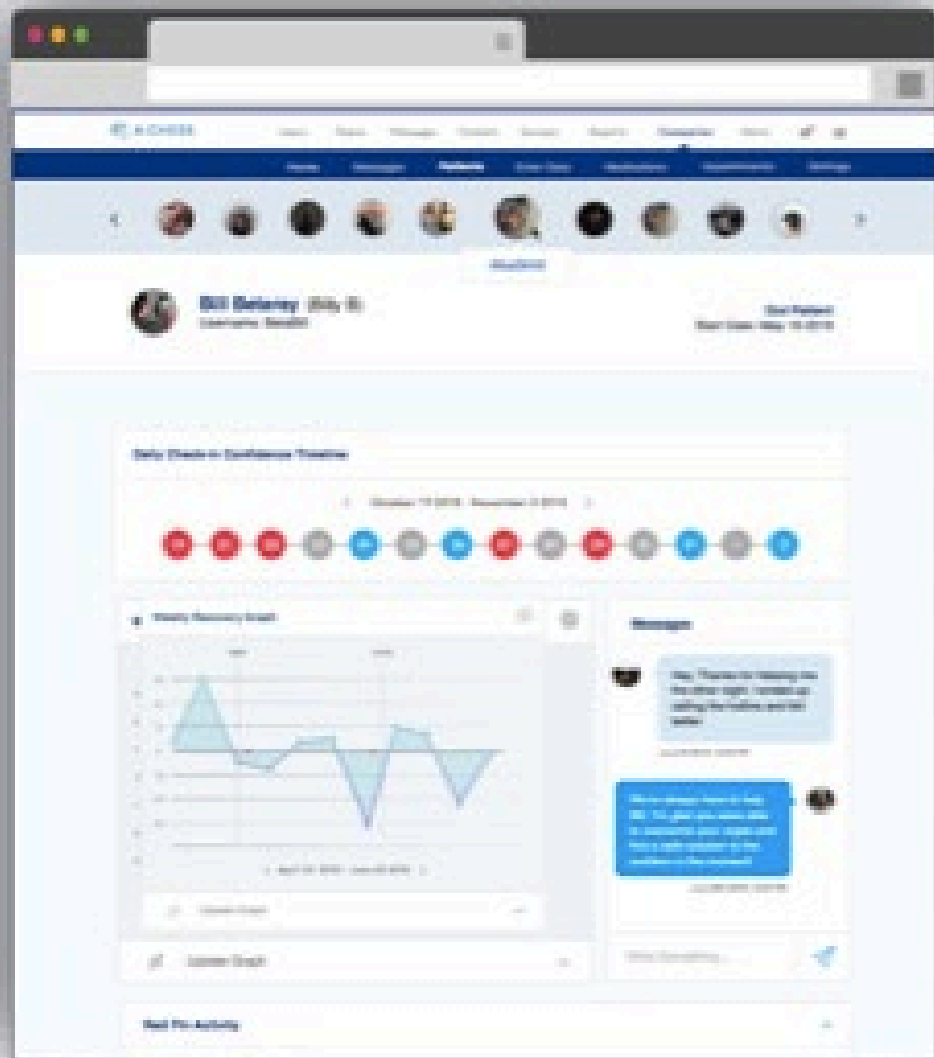
Risk Factor Questions
- Rate your difficulty sleeping
- Rate your drinking or use urges
- Rate your relationship troubles with family or friends
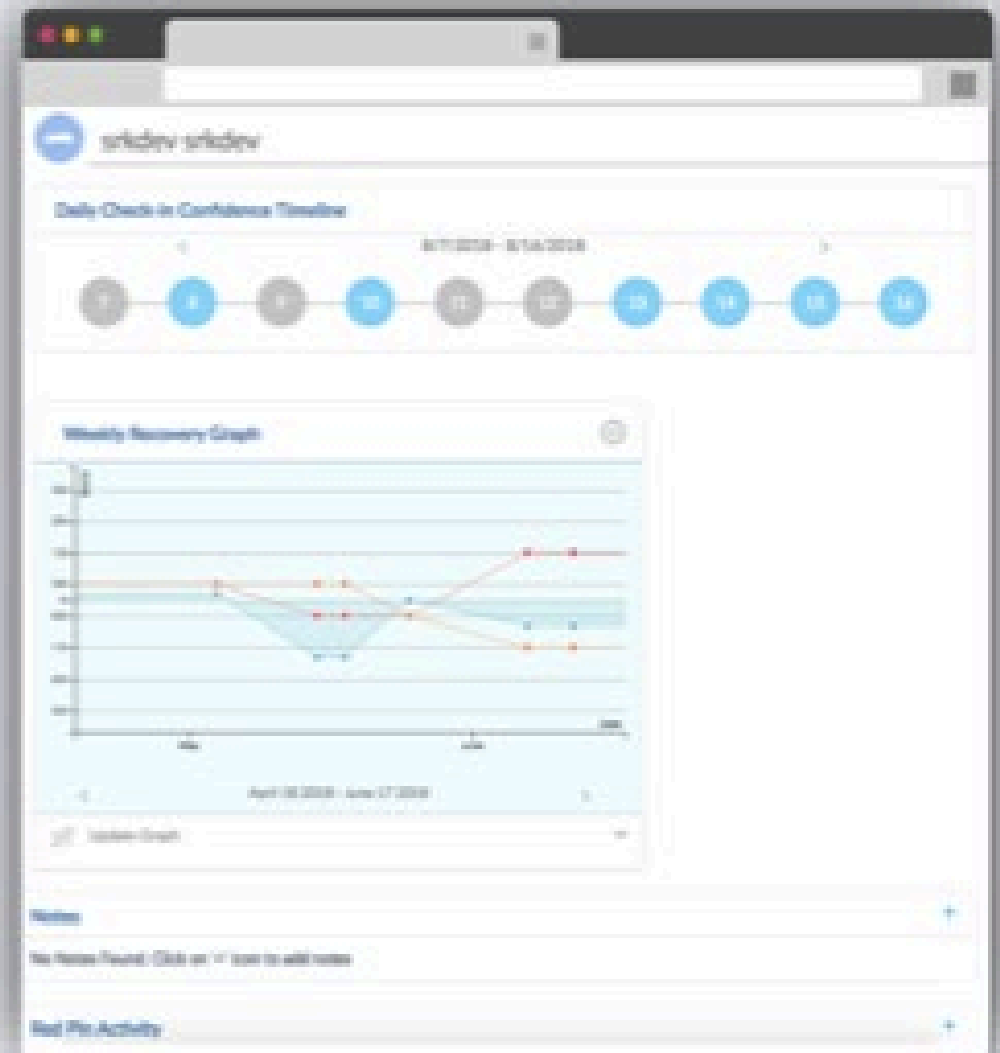- Rate your level of depression or anxiety

Upon completion
- Motivational messages displayed, content offered
- APF counselor updated
- Recovery score calculated

Connections App: Provider Dashboard

Evidence-based Technology

Originally called A-CHESS the platform was created by:

- University of Wisconsin

- National Institute on Drug Abuse

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

- NIATx (formerly the Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment)

CHESS Health provides the licenses for the technology to providers and manages functionality. **The Connections mobile app utilizes scientifically proven methods to help individuals abstain from substance use & increase their engagement in recovery supports**

Trends in other parts of the world

- "Falling through the cracks in quarantine"
  - (https://medicine.yale.edu/news/yale-medicine-magazine/falling-through-the-cracks-in-quarantine/)
- Medication shortages
- Dispensing interruptions
- Interruptions in safe injectables
- "Non-essential" visits/visitors, triaging of beds, clinic space
- Usual sources of drugs not available, what will be substituted
- Prolonged effects of this pandemic for SUD treatment community

Resources

- Fliers shared on ECHO site

- https://www.samhsa.gov/coronavirus
  https://www.bridgetotreatment.org/covid-19

- https://crackdownpod.com/podcast/episode-14-emergency-measures/

- https://www.addictionpolicy.org/connections-app

- https://www.addictionpolicy.org/post/free-smartphone-app-offering-telehealth-support-for-those-struggling-with-addiction-during-covid-19

- https://www.addictionpolicy.org

- https://medicine.yale.edu/news/yale-medicine-magazine/falling-through-the-cracks-in-quarantine/