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For immediate release

New self-help hazardous drinking intervention app ‘tailored’ for Kiwi use

An innovative new version of an app designed to steer potentially problematic drinkers away from addiction is about to be put through its paces in Auckland.

Researchers from Waitemata DHB, the University of Auckland and the University of Alaska Anchorage are now looking for 200 volunteers to help test a New Zealand adaption of Step Away – an app currently used in the US to encourage a more moderate approach to drinking.

Waitemata DHB Director of Specialist Mental Health and Addictions Services, Dr Susanna Galea-Singer, is among those overseeing the clinical trial. She says the app is tailored to provide local information and support as well as offering coping strategies and weekly progress reports for drinkers who are trying to kick or curb old habits.

“The real ground-breaking component of this app is its ability to link hazardous drinkers with local service provision if required – the app will ensure that people get the help they are looking for.”

Dr Galea-Singer says the 200 volunteers selected to participate in a six-month clinical trial of the app must be Auckland-based, aged over 18 and motivated to change their drinking habits. Potential recruits can find out more at www.stepaway.nihi.auckland.ac.nz and a series of advertisements is also planned for community newspapers and social media.

Dr Galea-Singer says anyone identified during the screening process as already having moderate to severe alcohol dependence will be given the opportunity of referral to addiction treatment providers for help but will not be included in the trial.

“This application is aimed at people who have not yet reached that point,” she says. “It offers a very promising way for people to address and self-manage hazardous drinking - it’s a public health intervention.

“The app is designed to help people realise what harm they may be doing to themselves through excessive drinking and how they can access support if it is required,” Dr Galea-Singer says. “It’s all about being proactive and nipping certain behaviours in the bud before they became too much of a problem.”

Waitemata DHB, working through its CEO-sponsored Leapfrog programme, is a national leader in the development and implementation of eHealth initiatives that have recently included eVitals, ePrescribing and eReferrals – electronic systems that dispense with potentially problematic paper-based processes to improve patient experience, safety and outcomes.

CEO Dr Dale Bramley says Step Away is another example of modern technology being used to provide improved and readily accessible models of care.

“It is especially exciting to see apps being developed for preventative healthcare initiatives of this nature. Smartphones are part of most people’s lives now and we are continually exploring new and innovative ways to develop their use for the betterment of our patients.”

The Step Away study has received funding from the Health Research Council of New Zealand.

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