

Evaluation of 'Let's Kick Butt 2017': An Incentivised Mass Quit-Smoking Challenge for Mental Health and Addiction (MH&A) Services Users

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BACKGROUND:

Smoking rates remain disproportionately high (55% to 60%) in people with serious mental illnesses.¹⁻²

Cessation is achievable in this group, as in other vulnerable populations, with the support of health services.³

To achieve the target of a Smokefree Aotearoa by 2025, innovative solutions need to be tried to increase engagement and reduce smoking prevalence in this particularly difficult to engage population segment.⁴



The above 12-week challenge was one such solution piloted by Auckland and Waitemata district health boards during mid-2017 to assist smokers to quit or cut down on smoking.

Group based therapy (GBT) was delivered under the Motivational Interviewing (MI) framework, which takes the harm reduction approach.

Eighty-five long-term smokers with stable conditions were recruited from a pool of community and residential patients and were split into teams of five. These teams competed for the best weekly and overall outcomes.

They received weekly counselling, support and smoking cessation therapy and tools (SCT) for six weeks, with extended three-week engagement & relapse prevention support phases respectively at either end of the challenge.

OBJECTIVES:

The evaluation considered the implementation fidelity of the programme and assessed the level of client engagement and satisfaction. The influence of peer support, competition and cash incentives on the outcomes was also studied.



METHODS:

Formative evaluation was chosen to monitor and evaluate implementation fidelity and summative evaluation (involving both qualitative and quantitative data) to assess other outcomes e.g. attendance rate, dropout rate, changes in exhaled breath carbon monoxide (CO) readings, and changes in the smoking status at completion.

FINDINGS:

- 83% of the registered clients completed the challenge. (n=68/82; target= 90%)
- 36% reported being smoke free (n=20/68)
- 60% of the remaining 48 were smoking fewer than five cigarettes a day. This is significant because a majority of the participants were heavy (20+ cigs/day) long term (10 to 20 years) smokers at the start.

- A high (90%) rate of engagement and satisfaction amongst those who completed the challenge.
- A four-week follow up suggested many participants had relapsed.

CONCLUSION:

GBT delivered under the MI framework - when combined with motivational tools such as competitive team challenge, cash incentives and daily bio feedback in the form of CO readings - can help increase engagement and reduce smoking in MH&A service users. The programme was implemented as intended and the combination of different motivational tools provided valuable learning.

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Participant Comments

"I didn't want to let the team down. I wanted to blow low (CO readings)."

"The financial incentives were good. However the mere fact that you're on the journey together was more important."

"I think I'd be lost without the support (of the) group."

"I need cigarettes to control my anxiety. I am not (yet) ready to quit."