INTRODUCTION

- Substance Use Disorders are Family Disorders:
  - Attitudes and patterns of drinking and drug use are influenced heavily by the family
  - Couples influence each other’s alcohol and drug use
  - Drinking and drug problems develop within a social network
  - People resolve their drinking and drug problems within a social network
  - The social network is central to the maintenance of change

- Over the past 35 years, Dr. McCrady and her colleagues at Brown University, Rutgers University, and the University of New Mexico have developed and tested an approach to involve intimate partners in alcohol treatment

- This treatment, Alcohol Behavioral Couple Therapy (ABCT) is recognized by the American Psychological Association and the National Registry of Empirically Supported Practices and Programs (NREPP).

- This poster provides an overview of this research program and key findings.

METHOD

- Six major studies have contributed to our knowledge of ABCT:
  - Alcoholism Joint Admission Project (AJAP)
    - Study of impact on drinking of joint admission, conjoint therapy, and individual therapy
    - 33 patients with alcohol problems (20 male; 13 female)
    - Assessment at baseline, one month, 6 month, and 4 year follow-up
  - Project for Alcoholic Couples Treatment (PACT)
    - Study of impact on drinking of different components of spouse involvement: spouse presence, spouse change, relationship change
    - 45 persons with AUDs (33 male; 12 female) and their spouses
    - Assessed at baseline, then monthly post-treatment for 18 months
  - Maintaining Change after ABCT
    - Study of ways to maintain change after alcohol behavioral couple therapy – relapse prevention and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)/Alanon
    - 90 males with AUDs and their female partners
    - Assessed at baseline and followed monthly for 18 months after treatment
  - Rutgers Women’s Treatment Project I
    - Randomized clinical trial comparing ABCT to individual cognitive behavior therapy (CBT)
    - 102 women with AUDs and their male partners
    - Assessed at baseline and followed quarterly for 12 months after treatment
  - Rutgers Women’s Treatment Project II
    - Randomized clinical trial comparing ABCT to a blend of individual CBT and ABCT
    - 59 women with AUDs and their male partners
    - Assessment at baseline and followed for a year after treatment
  - Mechanisms of Alcohol Treatment Engaging Spouses (MATES)
    - Study of mechanisms by which ABCT works
    - Transcribed and coded first session and mid-treatment therapy sessions from four ABCT studies

RESULTS

- Alcoholism Joint Admission Project:
  - Joint Admission
  - Conjoint Tx.
  - Individual Tx.

- Project for Alcoholic Couples Treatment:
  - Minimal Spouse Involvement
  - Alcohol-Focused Spouse Involvement
  - Alcohol Behavioral Couple Therapy

- Maintaining Change after ABCT:
  - ABCT
  - AA/ABCT
  - RP/ABCT

- Rutgers Women’s Treatment Project I:
  - ABCT

- Rutgers Women’s Treatment Project II:
  - ABCT + CBT

- Summary: Jointly admitting couples to a hospital for treatment did not produce better outcomes than spouse involvement in outpatient treatment alone.

- Summary: Couples had the best outcomes when treatment focused on drinking, spouse coping with drinking, and the couple’s relationship (ABCT).

- Summary: The hypotheses about the mechanisms by which ABCT works were partially supported. Greater therapist adherence to the treatment led to less drinking during treatment. Both patients and partners said less about not changing (counterchange talk) as treatment progressed, and were more positive toward each other.

SUMMARY

- Involving intimate partners in alcohol treatment improves both drinking outcomes and relationship stability and satisfaction.
- Treatment is most efficacious when it addresses both the drinking and the couple’s relationship (ABCT).
- Alcohol Behavioral Couple Therapy is particularly effective for women who also are struggling with other psychological problems.
- Providing a blend of individual and couple therapy seems to improve initial gains even more.
- We are beginning to understand how ABCT works.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

- Test a more flexible, brief, family-involved treatment that can be (a) used with any family member, (b) integrated into substance abuse treatment settings, and (c) learned readily by front-line counselors.
- Tailor the treatment to Veteran populations dealing with concurrently with alcohol and other problems (with Rutgers colleagues)
- Test a prevention-focused application to enhance couple functioning (with Rutgers colleagues)
- Create smartphone application to provide basic skills to families coping with DWI (with Dr. Woodall)

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