Using Text Messages to Improve Substance Use Treatment Outcomes: A Practical How-To Online Training Series

Scott Walters
University of North Texas Health Science Center
1. Overview of best practices
2. A couple simple demonstrations
3. Making it work for you
U.S. Phone Ownership

% of U.S. adults who own the following devices

- Cellphone
- Smartphone

Mountain Plains ATTC (HHS Region 8)

ATTC
Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Text messages are everywhere!

95 percent of U.S. adults own a cellphone; 77% have a smartphone

6 billion text messages sent each day in the U.S.

46 times per day average adult checks phone 46 times per day.

5 under 5 sec 98% of messages are opened; most read in under 5 seconds
Text messages can change behavior!

29 vs 36
percent no-show

Percent no-show, with vs. without text reminder

36
percent increase

36% increase in smoking cessation (similar to other brief interventions)

56
% fewer days

Probationers who chose not to receive reminders attended 56% fewer treatment days

Text messages are scalable, easy to use, can be tailored, and reach people in real-time!
Efficacy of Text Message-Based Interventions for Smoking Cessation
Odds Ratio and 95% CI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>LCL</th>
<th>UCL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ybarra et al. 2013</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ybarra et al. 2012</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>8.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittaker et al. 2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shi et al. 2014</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>4.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rodgers et al. 2013</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naughton et al. 2014</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naughton et al. 2012</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haug et al. 2013</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free et al. 2011</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free et al. 2009</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borland et al. 2012</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bock et al. 2013</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>64.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroms et al. 2014</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Favors Control: OR = 1.37, LCL = 1.25, UCL = 1.5
Overall Favors Treatment: OR = 1.37, LCL = 1.25, UCL = 1.5
Most people said messages were helpful

- Always: 46
- Fairly Often: 24
- Sometimes: 12
- Almost Never: 0
- Never: 3

Walters & Rendon, 2017
When did people want messages? A study of substance-using probationers

Spohr et al., 2015
When did people want messages? A study of supportive housing residents

Walters & Rendon, 2017
Types of messages people wanted

- Positive: 150
- Negative: 27
- Checking-in: 10
- Appointment Reminder: 110

Walters & Rendon, 2017
Messages can help with...

Motivation
Remember how much money you are saving by being sober!

Skills, ideas, & planning
Some people find it’s helpful to talk to people with clean time, to see how they did it.

Reminders about action
It’s almost the weekend! Remember to spend time with sober people.

Source: Fogg (2009)
Develop great messages (Part 1)

• **Avoid textese.** Use full words, and spell them correctly.
  – Don’t say: How r you 2day
  – Say: How are you today?

• **Use benefit-oriented language.** Talk about the benefits of change.
  – Don’t say: Think of what you might lose if you relapse!
  – Say: Think of what you’re gaining by staying sober!
Develop great messages (Part 2)

• **Use “I” statements.** Make it sound like the message is coming from a person.
  – Don’t say: Your group work is appreciated!
  – Say: I/We appreciate the work you’re doing in group!

• **Be directive.** Phrase messages in a directive (but not commanding) tone.
  – **Don’t say:** Some people find that it’s helpful to make a list of goals for the next year.
  – **Say:** Spend five minutes today jotting down some goals for the next year.
Develop great messages (Part 3)

• **Send tips and resources**
  – Links fit nicely into text messages, and can greatly expand their power
  – Consider giving options to receive tailored tips

• **Be aware of security**
  – Texting is not a secure technology
  – Talk to your legal counsel and/or obtain written permission
  – Keep messages general; never send PHI this way
Extra Credit! How could you improve these messages?

• Attendees should bring all relevant paperwork to the orientation.
• The book we will use is, Get your Loved One Sober, by Robert Meyer.
• Attendees who arrive late will not receive a bus pass.
• Anyone who wants to volunteer should indicate so via our website.
• Your recent lab tests indicate an A1C level of 10. You should schedule a visit soon with your PCP to discuss.
P.S. The manual has tons of samples!

**Appreciative Stems**
- Great work tonight! You really know a lot about...
- Your...has really paid off!
- You have a lot of great ideas for...
- You’re doing things right!
- That’s wonderful. It really shows a lot of...
- You’re really strong/brave/thoughtful/proactive.
- You’re very committed to...
- You’re working hard to...
- You’re way ahead of...

**Task Stems**
- Hi! A reminder to...
- Before group tonight, jot down a couple...
- Come prepared to say something about...
- Today, spend 5 minutes...
- Take a moment today to...
- Use today to think about...

**Relationships/Social Support**
- Why reinvent sobriety? Talk to someone with clean time to see how they did it.
- Have a Plan B! Put a number in your phone of someone you could call if you needed to talk.
- Surround yourself with the best people! Get in touch with old friends who might help you stay clean.
- Go to an NA or AA meeting, or other support group.
- Attend a church or faith group.
- Keep in touch with your sponsor, or find another who will better serve your needs.
- Volunteer to chair a recovery meeting in your area.

- Distance yourself from family and friends who use substances.
- Reach out to family and friends who may have distanced themselves while you were using substances.

**Avoidance/Triggers**
- Wait it out! Most urges go down with time.
- Go for a walk! Most urges are short lived.
- Stay busy! Volunteer, schedule social time with friends, or work on a project.
- Memorize sections of the big book or scripture.
- Meditate or pray. A clear mind is a happy mind.
- Don’t set yourself up! Look through your house and vehicle, and throw out any drugs or drug equipment.
- Place matters! Avoid hanging out in places where you used to use substances.
- Change can be hard! Give yourself a reward for doing well.

**Cognitive Reappraisal**
- Make a list of the ways that using has affected the people you care about most, like children, family, or friends.
- Think of the ways your life will be better when you’re substance-free.
- Keep a picture of a loved one where you can see it. Spend just a moment each day thinking about the benefits of your sobriety for this person.
- Self-forgiveness is part of recovery. Let go of guilt, bitterness, and resentment.
- Failure to stay sober on one day does not mean failure for life. Recommit to your goals and start fresh.
- Change is hard! You should be proud of the progress you have made!
Use a batch texting provider
Example 1:
Simple reminders with fixed content

- Week 1: Stages of Change
  - See you in group tonight at 7pm!

- Week 2: Expectations
  - See you in group tonight at 7pm!

- Week 3: Personal Values
  - See you in group tonight at 7pm!

- Week 4: Relationships
  - See you in group tonight at 7pm!
### Simple Reminder Text Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/1/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>See you in group at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>See you in group at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/15/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>See you in group at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/22/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>See you in group at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Week 1: Thinking about Change
• What kind of changes are right for you? Come find out at 7pm tonight!
• Keep a picture of a loved one where you can see it. They’re more important than getting high!
• Get the best information! Talk to someone with clean time to see how they did it.

Week 2: Dealing with Cravings
• Tonight we'll talk about the secret to managing cravings. All will be revealed! Join us at 7pm!
• Wait it out! Most urges go down with time.
• Don’t blindside yourself! Look through your house and vehicle, and throw out any drugs or drug equipment.

Week 3: A Positive Mindset
• Tonight we'll open up our minds to see what's inside. See you at 7pm!
• Self-forgiveness is an important part of recovery. Work on letting go of guilt, bitterness, and resentment.
• Failure to stay sober on one day does not mean failure for life. Recommit to your goals and start fresh.

Week 4: Good People
• Tonight we'll talk about the magic of social support. Become like the best people around you! See you at 7pm!
• Volunteer to chair a recovery meeting in your area.
• Reach out to family and friends who may have distanced themselves while you were using substances.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/1/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>What kind of changes are right for you? Come find out at 7pm tonight!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/2/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Keep a picture of a loved one where you can see it. They're more important than getting high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/5/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Get the best information! Talk to someone with clean time to see how they did it!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>Tonight we'll talk about the secret to managing craving. Join us at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Wait it out! Most urges go away with time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/12/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Don't blindsight yourself! Look through your house and vehicle and throw away any drugs or drug equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/15/19</td>
<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>Tonight we'll open up our minds to see what's inside. See you at 7pm!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Self-forgiveness is an important part of recovery. Take a few minutes today to work on letting go of guilt and resentment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/18/19</td>
<td>9:00am</td>
<td>Failure to say sober one day doesn't mean failure for life. Recommit to your goals and star fresh!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Extra Credit! What kind of messages could you send...

• ...right before before a meeting? (Prep people)
• ...right after a meeting? (Reinforce concepts)
• ...a couple days later? (Give homework, tips)
Example 3: Tailored tracks using keywords

**THINK**

- You're wondering whether it's worth making a change. Sometimes people talk to people they trust to see what their concerns are.
  - Make a list of the ways that drugs have affected the people you care about most.
  - Keep a picture of a loved-one where you can see it. Spend just a moment each day thinking through the benefits of your sobriety for this person.

**BEGIN**

- Over the next week, we'll be sending some tips that are tailored just to you! Stay tuned...
  - Congratulations! You've decided to change. Some people write down their commitment, and a plan for change.
  - Why reinvent sobriety? Talk to someone with clean time to see how they did it.
  - Surround yourself with the best people! Get in touch with old friends who might help you stay clean.

**CHANGES**

- Congratulations! You've already made positive changes. Some people think about getting in touch with old friends who might help them stay clean.
  - Stay busy! Volunteer, schedule social time with friends, or work on a project.
  - Change is hard! You should be proud of the progress you have made in overcoming substance abuse!
In the next week...

• Jot down a few messages that could build motivation, help with planning, or remind clients to do something.

• Make sure messages are direct, positively framed and sound like they are coming from a person.

Extra Credit!

• Sign up for a free trial with Textedly or another program.

• Pick one keyword and develop a simple text sequence.

• Come prepared to share ideas and frustrations on August 12 @12pm central!
Thank you for attending!

See you next time!

August 12, 2019
11:00am Mountain Time
12:00pm Central Time

mpatcc.org