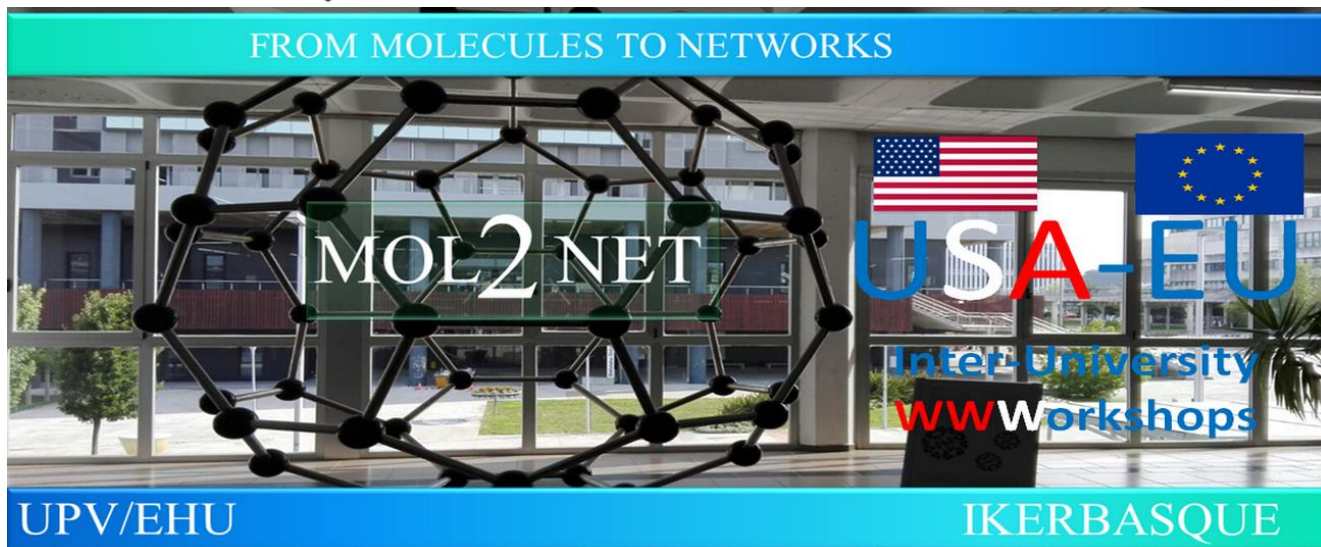




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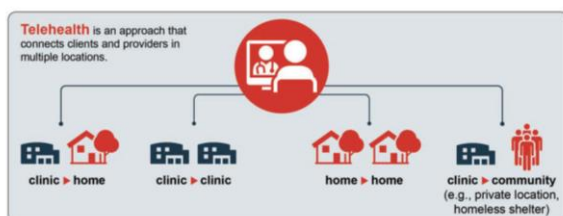
Using Technology in Provision of Recovery Supports for Methadone Patients in Vietnam

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Graphical Abstract



Abstract.

Drug addiction, including addiction to heroin is a chronic relapsing disorder similar to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and asthma. Science and practices have approved that addiction treatment, including using medication such as methadone and counseling works and helps those face with addiction recover. The Vietnam's Methadone program initiated in 2008 has been a success in treating and helping individuals addict to heroin recovery and be productive members of family and community. When treated and recovered well, patients reduce using drugs and sharing needle, as such reduce

HIV infection and other blood born diseases such as hepatitis B and C. Building an effective addiction treatment system and skilled workforce capable of responding to changes in drug use problems requires innovations, such as using technology to ensure patients adhere to treatment and therapies, including counseling, group recovery and social supports. We would like to share our summer experience working in a Methadone clinic, researching online resources to suggest few solutions for the contribution of continued improving treatment and recovery efforts.

Introduction (optional)

Recovery in addiction has been defined as a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. There have been many paths to recovery, using assistance from medications such as methadone and counseling. Assistance from medications is the use of approved medicines, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies, to provide a “whole-patient” approach to the treatment of disorders. Medications used in addiction treatment are clinically driven and tailored to meet each patient’s needs. Research shows that a combination of medication and therapy can successfully treat these disorders, and for some people struggling with addiction, MAT can help sustain recovery. MAT is also used to prevent or reduce opioid overdose.

Telehealth or distance technical assistance is the use of telecommunication technologies and electronic information to provide care and facilitate client-provider interactions. This distance assistance form has been introduced in Vietnam for recent years and increasingly used during the COVID-19 context. In short is can be described below as the central level and experts to any settings, in clinics or homes of clients.

The Government of Vietnam has seen Methadone very cost effective in improving all aspects of life of individuals addict to heroin. The Vietnam’s methadone maintenance treatment program, including the dispensing medication and psychosocial supports, has been seen as a great success to control HIV/AIDS among people who use and inject opioid or heroin. Vietnam has one of Asia’s fastest growing HIV rates. By the end of 2015, the number of people living with HIV was approximately 250,000. To date, the HIV epidemic has been concentrated among people who inject drugs (PWID), primarily heroin and those using amphetamine type stimulants (ATS). Piloted in 2008, initially as a harm reduction approach, as of July 2021, approximately 53 thousands patients are on treatment at 361 specialized methadone clinics in all 63 provinces of Vietnam.

In recent years, Vietnam along with other countries are experiencing a pro-longed and serious wave of COVID-19. COVID cases in Vietnam up to December 9 surpasses 1.3 million. Many programs, including addiction treatment in healthcare setting and clients, are facing serious health and employment disruptions and challenges. In-person counseling at methadone clinics has been less encouraged to

reduce exposures for infecting COVID-19. As such, sharing and scaling up technology-based supports, such as effective use of Zoom for addiction treatment and recovery are critical.

Materials and Methods (*optional*)

Methods

We share our summer experience our summer work in a Methadone clinic and suggest few solutions for improving treatment and recovery efforts using Zoom technology.

Agreed by the director of Dai Dong Methadone Clinic, we teamed up with a counseling expert and the Dai Dong clinic counselor to do clinical counseling and supervision using a Zoom application. We observed counseling sessions by the counselor for a total of 30 patients, scheduling three days per week in June of the year 2021. This month, among the 6 months duration that social distancing has been applied due to the 4th wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, restricting all travel back and forth to Hanoi and Nam Dinh, as well as many other clinics and locations in Vietnam.

Dai Dong Methadone clinic is one of very few private facilities in Vietnam allowed to treat opioid dependence using methadone. The clinic has been authorized by the Department of Health of Nam Dinh Province since 2015 and is among five clinics in the whole province.

Results and Discussion (*optional*)

Dai Dong Methadone clinic is one of very few private facilities in Vietnam allowed to treat opioid dependence using methadone. The clinic has been authorized by the Department of Health of Nam Dinh Province since 2015 and is among five clinics in the whole province. Located in Giao Thuy district, lying within the rural north-east Ocean coastline and the mouth of Red River, Dai Dong clinic currently dispenses methadone for 267 patients daily, contributing to 14% of all methadone patients (n = 1,945) of the Nam Dinh Province. The running costs for operation, salary for staff and medications for patients are subsidized by the central government. Patients only pay about 13 US dollars per month to cover some administrative expenditures as required nationally.

We spent 24 hours in 20 counseling sessions at the methadone clinic. Each session lasted for at least two hours, from 8.30 - 10.30AM, on Monday, Wednesday or Friday. It is important to note that the counselor and staff were busy as they have had various clinic tasks. Plus they were deployed for COVID-19 responses by the clinic and the community authorities in ad-hoc basis.

The motivation and commitment of our team to this work are critical. We seek to advocate for the availability and integration of services so patients can best access.

As described below, we understood disruptions due to COVID-19 or economic challenges would break the three key sources for recovery. Breaking the recovery resources would make the patients come back to the use of heroine and that effects their health, life and even deaths.

Conclusions (*optional*)

Our summer experience at the Dai Dong Methadone clinic affirms the benefits and how to use Zoom technology effectively for supporting the work counselor to improve treatment and recovery for patients. Given the busy schedule and challenges often occur when using technology, careful preparation would be critical. This might include close collaboration within the group of people involved, including counselors and patients to ensure maximizing session quality and interactions. Finally, we have planned to expand this model to reach more clinics and patients, including supporting children of those in recovery to better study, particularly in COVID-19 pandemic context.

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