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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Comparison of Virtual and In-Person Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training

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Abstract

Purpose: There is limited research comparing virtual and in-person tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) training. As a result of COVID-19, the Duke-UNC (University of North Carolina) Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training Program (Duke-UNC TTS) transitioned from an in-person to a virtual format, allowing for a comparison of these two training formats.
Methods: We conducted an observational study comparing Duke-UNC TTS attendance and evaluations at three courses provided in person in 2019 with the same three courses provided virtually in 2020.
Results: The transition from in-person to virtual format was associated with more than a doubling of course attendance. The in-person format enrolled 112 participants; the virtual format enrolled 232 participants, $p < 0.05$. The virtual format was associated with more than two times the proportion of out-of-state participant attendance. The in-person format enrolled 22.3% out-of-state attendees; the virtual format enrolled 52.8% out-of-state attendees, $p < 0.05$. Course evaluations showed similar quality scores for measuring perceived knowledge acquisition and course satisfaction.
Conclusions: The virtual TTS training format had higher attendance and wider geographical reach without significantly losing quality than the in-person training format. Accordingly, TTS training programs should consider the continued delivery of training through interactive virtual formats to increase accessibility for participants.

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Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States.[1] Although most people who smoke express a desire to quit, less than 10% of people who smoke receive evidence-based tobacco use treatment during their cessation attempt.[2] One reason for this is that health providers, on average, receive only minimal training (e.g., less than 1 h) in evidence-based treatment of tobacco use.[3,4]

Tobacco treatment specialist (TTS) training programs offer accredited courses in evidenced-based tobacco use pharmacotherapy, behavioral counseling, and systems support, with the goal of increasing the reach and effectiveness of tobacco use treatment across the US. Currently, 25 TTS programs are accredited by the Council for Tobacco Treatment Training Programs (CTTP) worldwide.[4] A National Certificate of Tobacco Treatment Practice is awarded to participants who complete an accredited TTS training course, pass a national exam, and document 240 h of tobacco treatment.

Accredited in 2016, the Duke-UN (University of North Carolina) Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training Program (Duke-UNC TTS) is a collaboration among three organizations: the Duke Smoking Cessation Program, the University of North Carolina Tobacco Treatment Program, and the North Carolina Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch, part of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. The Duke-UNC TTS Training Program leverages the varied expertise of its three partner organizations to provide didactic and experiential training through lectures, small group learning, and practical case applications. The program curriculum promotes the use of FDA-approved pharmacotherapies