

Survey Shows VA Psychologists Need Pathological Gambling Training

Pathological gambling is a common, highly destructive disorder often overlooked by clinicians. VISN 1 MIRECC researchers surveyed 181 VHA psychologists on their clinical training, experience and competence to treat problem gambling. The results show that most psychologists report little or no formal training, clinical experience or confidence in their skills to treat patients for problem gambling. Most have not referred patients for treatment of problem gambling and do not know of a competent provider to refer patients to. On the positive side, the researchers identified a small subgroup of 9% who have more training, provide services and see themselves as competent to treat patients with pathological gambling. Formal training was a key factor for this more highly skilled group. Most of those with limited training and experience expressed interest in receiving additional training. The researchers recommend routine screening for gambling problems in VA mental health and substance use clinics and increased availability of specialty training in treatment for problem gambling. The Bedford-based research team included Charles Drebing, Americo Mello, Walter Penk, Christopher Krebs, E. Alice Van Ormer, Roger Peterson and Edward Federman.