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Gainful Employment Proving Effective Against Drug Addiction *Leading Scientist to Discuss ‘Therapeutic Workplace’ at ABAI Convention*

Gainful employment is proving an effective tool in promoting abstinence from illegal street drugs and encouraging participants to continue taking addiction-curbing medications.

So, says Kenneth Silverman Ph.D., professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and director of the university’s Center for Learning and Health. His research has most recently focused on the “therapeutic workplace” – use of paid employment as a financial incentive to address problems of drug addiction in low-income and poverty-stricken areas.

Dr. Silverman’s scheduled appearance as a presenter at the ABAI (Association for Behavior Analysis International) 45th Annual Convention, May 23-27, in Chicago is particularly timely, following publication of his latest study in the April 2019 edition of *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. The research, of which he is a co-author, concludes that employment as a reinforcing behavioral incentive, when combined with extended-release injectable naltrexone, leads to a statistically greater likelihood a person will abstain from opiates and continue medication therapy compared to medication treatment alone.

The study involved 84 heroin-dependent adults who were unemployed and medically approved for naltrexone.

The “therapeutic workplace” intervention offers paid employment to adults with histories of drug addiction. As a way of encouraging opioid-drug abstinence and adherence to prescribed medications, participants must provide drug-free urine samples to gain access to the workplace and maintain maximum rate of pay, Dr. Silverman explains.

“Research is demonstrating that the therapeutic workplace model is effective in promoting and maintaining abstinence from heroin, cocaine and alcohol and in

promoting adherence to naltrexone,” Dr. Silverman writes in an abstract to be discussed during an ABAI conference session at the Hyatt Regency East on May 27.

“Poverty is a pervasive risk factor underlying poor health, including drug addiction and HIV. Our research indicates that [positive] reinforcement using financial incentives can promote abstinence from cocaine and heroin in low-income adults with long histories of drug addiction, [as well as encourage] adherence to antiretroviral medications among low-income adults living with HIV,” Dr. Silverman relates.

In an article appearing in a December 2018 issue of the scientific journal *Experimental and Clinical Psychopharmacology*, Dr. Silverman indicates that the therapeutic workplace model “could form the basis for an effective anti-poverty program, particularly for those with a history of drug addiction or other health problems.”

“Employment-based reinforcement within the therapeutic workplace can promote and maintain drug abstinence, medication adherence, work, and other adaptive behaviors that people need to move out of poverty,” he says/

However, more research “directly targeting poverty” is needed, he adds.

In addition to his work on the therapeutic workplace, Dr. Silverman has studied development of computer-based training to help give chronically unemployed individuals job skills that will enable them to maintain long-term employment and escape poverty. He also has looked at how use of positive and negative behavior reinforcements in general – a process behavior analysts refer to as “operant conditioning” -- can address the “interrelated problems of poverty, drug addiction and health.”

“Considering the persistent nature of drug abuse in this country and the current opioid crisis, Dr. Silverman’s discussion should prove especially meaningful to convention participants,” says ABAI chief executive officer, Maria Malott Ph.D.

More information about the upcoming ABAI convention, including Dr. Silverman’s presentation, is available at www.abainternational.org.