UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
CENTER FOR
Behavioral Health +
Smart Technology

The HealthTech Update
May 6, 2019

Spotlight on:
Brian Suffoletto, MD

Core Faculty Member Brian Suffoletto, MD is Research Director of the Emergency Department of UPMC Mercy Hospital and a practicing clinician interested in using technology to improve patient support. His current research is focused on using a text-message intervention to reduce binge drinking among adolescents.

CARINGTXT

Between Thursday and today, what is the highest number of drinks you had on any drinking occasion? Text 0 if none.

PARTICIPANT

5

CARINGTXT

This is more than 80% of what the average young adult drinks in a weekend.

Would you be willing to set a goal to drink less than 5 drinks when you are drinking? Text yes or no.

PARTICIPANT

Yes

CARINGTXT

We believe that you have made a good choice to limit your drinking.

See a preview of our interview with Dr. Suffoletto below and visit our website for the <u>full interview</u>!

CBHST: What have you found to be the key ingredients to a text-message intervention targeting behavior risks?

Brian: First, you need to work with a team that understands what drives the behavior you're targeting. For example we know that certain things happen inside the brain of a young adult before they go out drinking. They start thinking about what that experience will be like; they develop "expectancies." They build a mental model of having fun and potentially getting drunk- and even though we as behavioral researchers view that as a negative, they often view that as a positive thing. You also need to know when that behavior occurs and what strategies you need to employ to intervene. Because digital technologies were only recently invented, we only recently began thinking about how in that moment, when somebody is in that risky pre-behavior state, we can strategize to divert them. The science of that is pretty nascent, but basic behavioral theory says you can't just tell people to change. For our alcohol program, we want teens to understand that you don't need 20 drinks when you go out to have a good time. Our program is an iterative process, and it's in the repetitiveness of the behavioral support that we're teaching someone the small steps to change.

Follow us on Twitter @HealthTechPitt

and check out our website

www.healthtech.pitt.edu !