1-1-2004

Comparison of pretreatment characteristics and treatment outcomes for alcohol-, cocaine-, and multisubstance-dependent patients.

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We investigated whether pretreatment characteristics and measures of outcome differed for alcohol-, cocaine-, and multisubstance-dependent patients receiving outpatient substance abuse treatment. One hundred and forty substance dependent individuals (32 alcohol, 76 cocaine, and 32 multisubstance) enrolled in a 12-week outpatient treatment program were compared across measures of addiction severity, personality, and treatment-readiness at admission. In-treatment, end-of-treatment and 9-month follow-up assessments of treatment outcome were then compared across the three groups. Outcome measures included reduction in problem severity, abstinence, retention, number of sessions attended, dropout, and counselor and patient ratings of treatment benefit. At admission, the multisubstance group had a higher proportion of positive urines, reported more severe drug, alcohol and psychiatric problems, and displayed higher impulsivity and anxiety scores than one or both of the other groups. However, multisubstance patients were more treatment ready in terms of adopting a total abstinence orientation than alcohol or cocaine patients. While a significant reduction in symptoms occurred for the total sample during treatment as well as at follow-up, comparisons of outcomes did not consistently favor any particular group. The three groups had equivalent improvements in eleven of fourteen during-treatment and five of seven follow-up measures. Despite pre-treatment differences, in severity and treatment-readiness, outcomes were more similar than different for alcohol-, cocaine-, and multisubstance-dependent patients. Clinicians should be cautious about forecasting treatment-outcomes for addicted patients based on their primary substances of abuse.