

RECOVERY

The official newsletter of the RCORP Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery at the Fletcher Group



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NEW TOOLS FOR THE TOOLKIT



by Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher

Because sudden physiological changes caused by stress and anxiety bypass logical, conscious thought, they easily act as triggers, turning everyday situations into dangerous emotional catalysts and possible return to use.

Fortunately, several new withdrawal management tools are now available. Some work by calming the nervous system so that stressful situations are not felt as powerfully. Others help people identify and manage their reactions to stress, turning triggers into opportunities for personal growth.

All the exciting new tools described in this issue are safe, portable, non-invasive, cost-effective, clinically proven, and non-pharmaceutical. The latter may be of special interest to some rural recovery home operators who prefer to avoid FDA-approved medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) such as methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone.

One important note: None of the tools and techniques described here should be thought of as stand-alone treatments. All should be used in conjunction with a comprehensive, personalized substance use treatment plan.

ACUDETUX ACUPUNCTURE

Acudetox is a unique form of acupuncture that specifically targets behavioral health, including addictions and co-occurring disorders. In addition to reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms, the procedure is safe, cost-efficient, and easily administered in both small and large group settings. Those benefits have led to its widespread practice in numerous agencies supporting addiction recovery, including more than 500 state programs in the United States and over 1,500 addiction programs worldwide.

Launched as a grass-roots response to the opiate epidemic, Acudetox was formalized in 1985 by the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association which spreads the practice through workshops conducted by NADA-certified trainers. NADA estimates that over 25,000 providers in 40 different countries have been trained in the procedure.

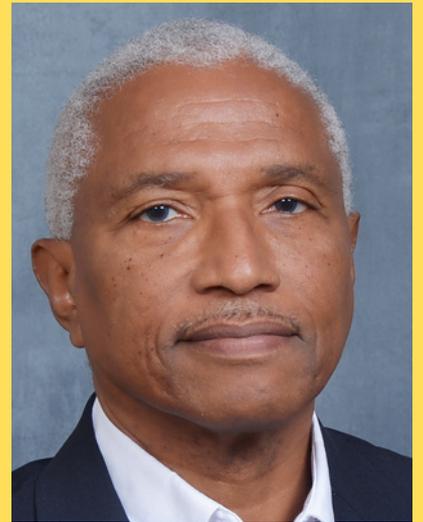
Proven Effective

According to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Acudetox has proven itself effective in relieving acute and chronic distress, thereby reducing drug cravings and contributing to improvements in addiction program engagement and retention. Acudetox has proven particularly effective when combined with counseling, education, medical support, and self-help groups such as AA and NA. It is also drug-free, cross-culturally compatible, and easily integrated into various behavioral health settings.

In the Fletcher Group's recent February 5 webinar, NADA President Dr. Kenneth Carter described how Acudetox works. Small, sterilized, disposable needles are placed gently into five specific sites on each ear to calm the nervous system and promote emotional balance. Recipients then sit quietly in a group setting for up to 45 minutes as the treatment takes effect.

Benefits vary from one person to another but can include:

- Relief from stress and emotional trauma
- Reduced agitation and increased calmness
- Better sleep
- The discovery of inner quiet and strength
- A reduction in withdrawal symptoms
- Reduced cravings for alcohol and drugs, including nicotine
- An easier connection with therapeutic counseling



WATCH THE VIDEO

of our February 5 webinar with NADA President Dr. Kenneth Carter.

[CLICK HERE](#)



One fan is Kat Heredia, Community Recovery Coordinator at Piedmont Community Services in Franklin county, Virginia. "It's been phenomenal for a lot of our residents," she says, "not only for SUD but for other mental health challenges as well. It doesn't involve any prescribed verbal therapy so patients can listen to ambient music or just sit in silence for 45 minutes. That focused relaxation is valuable in and of itself, aside from the other health benefits."

A less invasive needle-free version of Acudetox uses small bandaids to hold ariaseeds or tiny metallic beads to the same five sites on the ear. "Both versions work well," says Heredia who has benefitted from both.

BIOFEEDBACK TRAINING

One challenge to those in recovery is something we all share: an inborn insensitivity to the body's reaction to stress and anxiety. Heart and breathing rates can suddenly increase, muscles contract, and skin perspire without us even noticing. That might not be a problem under normal circumstances. But if you're recovering from addiction and struggling with withdrawal, sudden physiological changes can trigger cravings leading to reuse.

That's what makes biofeedback training so exciting. Research indicates that as little as ten minutes practice per day can reduce cravings, impulsivity, and risk-taking for those recovering from addiction.

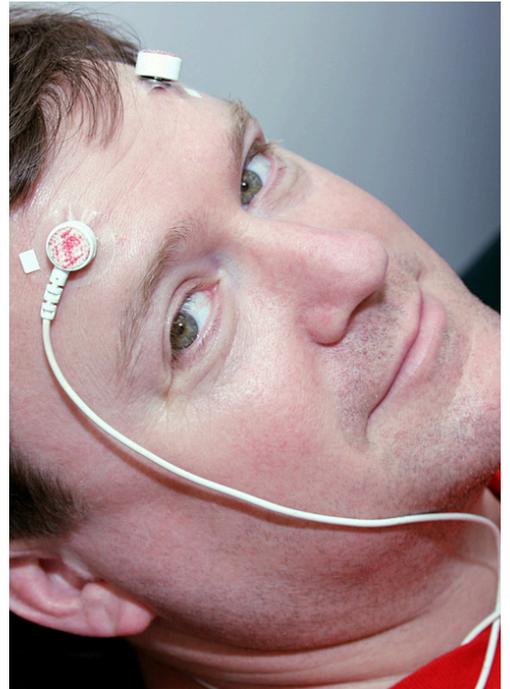
Biofeedback training takes advantage of something else we all share. Neuroplasticity is the brain's lifelong ability to reorganize its structure, functions, and neural connections in response to experiences, learning, or injury. It means that people in recovery can be taught to not only better recognize their physiological reactions to stress; they can also learn to control those reactions rather than be controlled by them.

How It Works

During a biofeedback session, a certified healthcare provider (typically a psychologist, physician, or therapist) places painless, non-invasive sensors on the patient's body to measure changes in heart rate, breath rate, muscle tension, skin temperature, and blood pressure. Computers process the information and immediately inform the patient either visually through changing graphics or patterns on a screen, audibly through varying tones or changes in music volume, or through vibrations from a wearable device. The provider then explains what the feedback means and guides the patient through deep breathing and other mindfulness exercises. The patient can then watch, hear, or feel the body's response in real time. With practice, the patient can even learn to control bodily changes away from the feedback device and provider.

Training, Not Treatment

Since several sessions will be needed with practice between, it's best to think of biofeedback as a form of training rather than a treatment. Its beauty, however, is that eventually the exercises become embedded in



the patient's memory and can be practiced any time, anywhere without the aid of biofeedback instruments.

Through repetition and experience the brain essentially rewires itself to relieve stress, improve performance, and ease aches and pains naturally and automatically.

Turning the Corner

By helping people become aware of their triggers and how best to respond to them, biofeedback training not only mitigates their power. It can turn what previously felt like an endless series of emotional ambushes into signposts for self-regulation and personal growth.

NEURO-ELECTRODE TREATMENT

Neuro-Electrode Treatment uses safe, painless low-amperage electrical stimulation behind each ear to help normalize brain chemistry and reduce withdrawal symptoms without the aid of traditional medications for opioid use disorder such as methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone.

FDA-cleared and are now on the market are several portable, wearable, non-invasive, and battery-powered devices. One such product, the NET (NeuroElectric Therapy) Device, has been extensively studied at Wayne State University. Within one hour of treatment, 98% of patients experienced a significant reduction in opioid withdrawal symptoms such as anxiety, nausea, and agitation. Patients using the device for at least 24 hours reported significantly fewer days of opioid and stimulant use in the three months post-discharge with many users reporting a complete loss of cravings. Patients who self-administered NET Device stimulation for at least one day also stayed longer in residential programs and reported fewer post-discharge days of drug use over three months. The Wayne State data also suggests that the NET device may prove equally effective with other substances such as cocaine and methamphetamine by stabilizing patients early in the detox process.

"These important findings," said Dr. Greenwald, Director of the Substance Addiction Research Division at WSU, "demonstrate that, for patients interested in non-pharmacological intervention, experiencing device stimulation for a day or more has the potential to reduce drug use across multiple substance types. This could offer a new tool for helping patients stabilize early in recovery and remain engaged in care."

In addition to being studied at Wayne State, the NET device is currently the subject of a follow-up study by the Fletcher Group to determine its longer-term effects.

Ground-Breaking Success in Kentucky

At the Scott County Detention Center in Georgetown, Kentucky (reportedly the first jail in the country to provide the treatment) inmates have significantly benefitted, according to Jailer Derran Broyles.

"An incarcerated environment, a jail environment was an ideal setting to use this," said Broyles who added that inmates are showing great success not only decreasing symptoms but eliminating the urge to use drugs altogether. "They're physically feeling better, and mentally, too," said Broyles. "They feel like they have some hope for a normal life again so it's almost like a new person." According to Broyles, other jailers have reached out to hear about and possibly implement the program.

Inmates receive the neuro-electrode treatment at the Isaiah House Treatment Center in Harrodsburg, Kentucky where Mike Cox says the NET device is transforming lives by reducing cravings. "A barrier to a lot of people who really want help and don't get it is the fear of detox, the fear of withdrawal and the sickness that comes with that," said Cox. "The NET device helps them fully engage in treatment much quicker and stay in treatment longer. We are witnessing clients discover hope and success like never before."