"Strange Days Indeed!"
Dick Dillon, Innovaision LLC
Mental Health Un-Conference 2020
May 12

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 can participate in real time.
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Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.
The transcriptionist is Elektra Panthar
The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speaker:
CM: Coughran Mayo (Dick Dillon)

[14:05] Gentle Heron: Good afternoon and welcome to this session of Virtual Ability’s 2020
Mental Health Un-Conference.
I’m Gentle Heron, and I’m here to welcome my friend Dick Dillon.
Dick has a great deal of experience in virtual worlds. He has been active in Second Life even
longer than I have.
He is now CEO of Innovaision LLC, a consulting firm for nonprofits wishing to work in virtual
worlds.
Mr. Dillon is also an experienced addiction counselor.
He is the founder of the Cox CARE Center, and co-creator of the Web of Addictions site,
which was one of the first websites to provide accurate information about addiction.
Here is where you can find the Web of Addictions: https://people.well.com/user/woa/
As an executive at Preferred Family Healthcare, he created Avatar Assisted Therapy, in
which therapeutic interventions are delivered in a virtual environment.
And furthermore, he is a member of the corporate Board of Directors for Virtual Ability, Inc.
Today Mr. Dillon is going to talk with us about the current situation we are in regarding
alcohol and drug addiction and treatment during this pandemic.
He will make some predictions about the near future that may be important to many
individuals’ mental health.
Please give a warm un-conference welcome to Mr. Dick Dillon.

[14:07] Shyla the Super Gecko (krijon): applause
[14:07] Zip Zlatkis: Welcome!
[14:07] Růžová bramborka: applause

[technical hiccup]
[14:10] Elektra Panthar: CM: We're used to this sort of thing aren't we, after 13 years in VW
It happens in RL too!
I'll give you more background and about my thoughts on the pandemic
Personally in recovery from alcoholism since 1981
It probably saved my life
[14:11] Gentle Heron: 39 years sober is wonderful

[14:11] Elektra Panthar: CM: I also volunteer at the center I recovered at, as part of alumni program
In 2011 I jokingly retired to become a consultant
I've had experience at every level about addiction, basically
I'm a cautious rational person
20% apparently, in the middle between those who thinks it's a joke and those who think
we're all going to die
So I'm following the guidelines, washing hands, protecting myself, avoiding crowds when outside, etc.
Not going to the poker game though, it's not safe with the cards and chips
I want to take good care of myself
My fingerprint reader doesn't recognize me anymore though so maybe I went overboard with the hand washing!
I was telling Gentle it's ironic that restaurants aren't essentials but liquor stores are
I've seen comments on the line of 'I work from home so I can drink whenever I like' on social media
Relapsation on social pressure about not drinking
I've seen a segment/sketch about having your kids drink - I can see the funny in it but as someone working with addiction I was horrified
In this time stress, economic uncertainty are high, lack of scrutiny of normal social life - they are all factors that increase the chance of addiction and relapse
Alcohol, prescription or illicit drugs - many people are likely to become addicted, and the problem is that the traditional way to help is not available at the moment
Virtual counselling centers exist, but most times face to face therapy is more effective
Some institutions have done a great job, like AA

[14:21] Elektra Panthar: CM: they meet wherever they can find spaces unexpensively, but 8 weeks ago they've all been shut down because of the restrictions. They shifted to well organized Zoom meetings, they go pretty well
About 30% of the people I know that go to these meetings prefer the virtual version because you don't have to drive, can do it in your home etc
The future of addiction treatment is suffering unfortunately
The infrastructure is at great risk
Healthcare funds, from the government, Medicaid/ Medicare programs are likely to be rerouted for a long time because of the pandemic. Insurance providers will also be swamped with virus related claims. One big organization of treatment providers held a meeting and there’s the chance 30-40% will not make it. By the end of May/June a large percentage of organizations won’t be able to have enough funds to keep operating as they have or at all.

[14:25] Gentle Heron: oh that is bad news to lose 30% of treatment centers
[14:26] Shyla the Super Gecko (krijon): Why aren't they getting a 'bail-out'???
[14:27] Xaria Mistswallow: That wouldn't be a viable option Shyla, if the government does 1 company they are bound to get asked by many more bankrupting the nation

[14:27] Elektra Panthar: CM: I'll leave you with a couple of takeaways
The numbers of people suffering from addiction will likely go up
Many classified as high risk will tip over
Second is more positive
I think virtual services are likely to stay
Counselling over the phone / Zoom, in virtual worlds are on the rise
They relaxed the requirements so these services are recognized
Immersive experiences are tested and proven to be effective, so that's positive
I'm optimistic about the future of treatment in VW
Any questions?

[14:31] Gentle Heron: Question- You said something about the opening up of different states was an experiment. Can you explain what you mean by that?
[14:31] Elektra Panthar: CM: It's an unplanned experiment
Relaxation of rules in some states to allow economy to recover sees certain areas where people are circulating more
We'll get differential data from different areas
We'll see if it's a good idea or not to reopen now
[14:32] Xaria Mistswallow: In America that would be a huge problem
America should lock things up more, not less
America is asking for a lot more deaths

[14:33] Gentle Heron: Question- What can we as individuals, as co-workers or family members or friends of people who may be tipping into addiction, do to help them not go in that direction?
[14:33] Elektra Panthar: CM: Great question
One thing to know: the average addictive regularly interacts intimately with 4 or 5 people within family / friends sphere, so if that happens it's noticeable (change in behavior etc)
There's a lot of information online on how to help within a family setting
It's important to talk about it
Sometimes it goes on until it's a big problem because people are reticent to talk to avoid conflict
It's ok to enjoy alcohol from time to time but if you know someone saying things like 'I've had a rough day, I need to drink'
If you notice they change in their responses to you when they drink for example
It’s best to start talking with the person

[14:36] Xaria Mistwallow: This is also why bars etc. should stay closed, this doesn’t help just with the people staying healthy but also to addicted people who won’t get their possible addictions

[14:37] Mook Wheeler is wondering if some people actually managed to kick borderline alcoholism during this time *because* alcohol is a social lubricant -- and the lockdown has eased that 'social' pressure to drink.

[14:37] Elektra Panthar: CM: Mook, yes that's possible as well

People develop a habit sometimes, in the US, to hang out on the weekends and drink

There's always been a variety of social expectations we are used to respond to, so if one of those has to stay home they see the difference

[14:39] Shyla the Super Geck (krijon): I am seeing restaurants here, because they cannot deliver alcohol, are selling it at pick up for 50%, which isn't helping...

[14:40] Elektra Panthar: CM: that's true Shyla

[14:38] ℳαʝɨҟƘɨ ɮ ӽ ڠ ɳ (majikvixen.lorefield): I think you all have a fairly good point... However, working at a grocery store and seeing these sales increase... I speculate it's because we're possibly out of cleaning supplies. Small percentage, probably... But I wanted to inform you so I could get a better idea of how big the worry may be

If there's nothing else, could be

[14:39] Elektra Panthar: CM: I wouldn't find that to be an outrageous concept Majik

[14:39] Xaria Mistwallow: more likely to drink, an addict will figure out a way to get their fix

[14:39] ℳαʝɨҟƘɨ ɮ ӽ ڠ ɳ (majikvixen.lorefield): Ah, kk, thanks

[14:39] Gentle Heron: [14:37] Mook Wheeler: QUESTION: When you say "addiction" you are speaking of alcoholism, is that right? Have you noticed other forms of addiction increasing as well during this time? And if so, which types?

[14:40] Elektra Panthar: CM: Yes Mook, social isolation, financial insecurity contribute to it

I subscribe to the idea that a drug is a drug is a drug

I think that stress contributes, it could happened with prescription drugs as well

As for illegal drugs unfortunately the lockdown is not total ad it's part of the economy everywhere, it probably didn't suffer too much

[14:40] Stranger Nightfire: must be rough on the gambling addicts

[14:40] Xaria Mistwallow: also for drugs, you won't see a drug dealer suddenly stay inside because of a virus, they earn too much and there is likely also a addiction in there for them


[14:42] Asia Connell: may I ask

If Second Life could to give a contribute for cure?

And in what way

[14:42] Elektra Panthar: CM: Giant question, Asia

If you mean being part of the way we address problems, absolutely

To deliver services to people who are unable to go to traditional centres

[14:42] Asia Connell: ty

yes
[14:43] Xaria Mistwallow: not part of the cure, but more likely a means to a way of at least giving it attention. If we can give the blind a way to walk around in SL, then I'm sure there is a way to give people with addictions also a reason to come in

[14:43] Shyla the Super Gecko (krijon): Can I ask, since you are a long-time virtual world resident...and there has not been an increase in Twelve Step meetings in Virtual Worlds while on Zoom and other platforms they have grown significantly. Do you have an opinion on the lack of significant traction in VW's for such support groups? I mean during the Covid situation...

[14:44] Elektra Panthar: CM: there’s always been addiction awareness in SL There are several addiction related groups that offer meetings in SL Some RL organizations are starting to look at SL / Zoom as a way to offer services Some organizations have been slow n the uptake about technology Some have been resistant to adopting technology, there are some concerns about SL / challenge of getting into a virtual world and fraud risk Learning curve is a concern as well There are some challenges with confidentiality of individuals and personal information Linden Labs is not inclined to provide a completely secure way to have a private conversation unfortunately

[14:47] Xaria Mistwallow: Shyla, people wish to keep their jobs and be meaningful, at least so far they fill their pockets. That is likely the main reason why change is rather difficult Also, with SL being just over 20 years old now and isn’t changing rapidly enough people will go off to do other things

[14:45] Lady Claire (clairedeair): I need to find a way to sell the pain pills that I am not using now that the virus is going on, I use to sell them to a few senior friends of mine. I'd hate to throw them in the trash if they become expired, how can I get rid of them while the virus is going on? These are people I know who are on the same stuff

[14:49] Elektra Panthar: CM: If they're prescription drugs prescribed to you specifically I'd advise against selling them

[14:49] Xaria Mistwallow: not just a bad idea, it's illegal to sell them, give away or loan them You can easily get a prison visit for that I also would recommend to just bring them back to where you got them from, they destroy all old medication so no one can get to them

[14:49] Lady Claire (clairedeair): ok but with the virus I am afraid to go near any hospital

[14:45] Mook Wheeler: COMMENT: And I can see the addictions being increasingly differentiated by a very real virtual wall during this time-- physical addictions, like drugs & alcoholism, and addictions which can be fed by the Internet -- like shopping, games, virtual reality, etc. COMMENT CLARIFICATION: increasingly split into two types of addiction -- physical ones, like food, drugs, alcohol, and non physical ones fueled by the Internet -- shopping, video games, etc During this time, I mean
Elektra Panthar: CM: I think that behavioural addictions that don't have a direct chemical component like alcohol have a chemical component in your brain though [mic cuts out]
It's easier to make a correlation in the changes that happen in your brain if you take alcohol or drugs than those that happen in your brain when you have a behavioral addiction (gambling, internet, sex etc)
There is data about it though
From my own perspective as a person who tried to develop services using VW that's a real consideration
We opened a centre in OpenSim, we can control confidentiality and access
SL has many users on the other hand and a community that knows how to use the tools already. It's a tug o' war.
As a treatment center it's more likely to go with the non commercial option for the sake of security against message reaching more people

Mαʝɨҟ醑ɨӽ녕ɳ(majikvixen.lorefield): I think what also contributes to people not using SL is the lack of good PR (as in YouTube videos) out there (as mentioned in some Lab Gab episodes - which is why they're promoting Lab Gab, SL Blogging Network, and others making good experiences/contributions to share with the public)... Because before this point, you would generally mostly find griever videos, product videos, + the stigma/taboo is that SL "is the video game where you can have sex" so that may be why SL has a "bad rap" that we're trying to recover from
...As far as professionalism goes, anyway
Axel-the-fox (axelfoxthefoxyfluff): yes
Go on some sites and mention using SL and they insult you and call you a basement dweller or a troll
Bixyl Shuftan: With the Newser, we do try for an overall good impression. While there is an occasional story about a bad character, there's plenty about groups like the Relay for Life, Team Diabetes, Homes for Our Troops, Team Fox, and others.
Gentle Heron: Thank you for that Bixyl.
Bixyl Shuftan: and welcome Gentle :-)
Elektra Panthar: CM: Over the years I tried with human resources to provide with a comprehensive approach to deal with drug use within the workplace. It's a huge problem and involves a lot of money as well. We try to work with business organization to help develop policies to identify problems symptomatic with addiction and how to deal with it. It's a problem to strike a balance because they are not diagnosticians themselves.

Gentle Heron: Question- Are people with disabilities more likely to become addicts than people without disabilities? Why or why not?
Elektra Panthar: CM: Although I'd say I haven't seen statistics that demonstrate dramatic differential, but some studies say it's noticeable. 22-23 million in the US have addiction problems and most aren't treating it / keeping it quiet. Some in the disabled community might be more at risk because they need to take more drugs than average and there's always the risk of mistakes in dosage, or problems having access and turning to friends etc.

Xaria Mistwallow: think it's rather too broad, there are so many different disabilities which means so many different outcomes.

Gentle Heron: Right Xaria.

Elektra Panthar: CM: We've all seen the classic story of Jim Fixx, responsible for the upswing in jogging - there's nothing that we do that could have benefit and that can be overdone too.

Gentle Heron: Jim Fixx may have been addicted to jogging
Elektra Panthar: CM: The key is finding balance. I had fun going to the casino or to the races, but rarely, while I saw friends that stayed and blew their money there. If many people complain to you whatever you're indulging in, go to a therapist with them and talk about it.

Mook Wheeler: All the grandmas said it first: "Moderation in all things" ;)

Elektra Panthar: CM: Thank you everyone.

Gentle Heron: Thank you Dick. This is such an important topic.
[15:05] Shyla the Super Gecko (krijon): great presentation

[15:07] Elektra Panthar: <<transcription ends >>