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Editor's note: Video and photos are available for download at bit.ly/1Txgewm.

'COUNSELOR IN YOUR POCKET' SMARTPHONE APP HELPS HEROIN ADDICTS WITH RECOVERY

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The city of Marion, Ohio, holds a special place in Brandi Spaulding's heart, but her hometown is now overshadowed by a dark cloud of devastation. Spaulding has watched heroin addiction rip this quaint city apart and claim the lives of young people she knew.

Spaulding, who will receive a doctoral degree in addiction psychology next month, decided she had witnessed enough destruction and wanted to reverse the deadly trend by providing 24/7 mobile counseling and social support to recovering heroin addicts.

"Addicts are at the highest risk of relapse within their first 90 days of recovery. They feel alone and aren't always willing to ask for help or make a phone call. So, we created an app that allows for ongoing, streamlined communication and resources at the touch of a button," said Spaulding, who works in concert with addiction medicine experts as an intern at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

"It's like they have a counselor in their pocket at all times," she said.

Inspired by [Brad Lander](#), a psychologist and clinical director of addiction medicine at OSU Wexner Medical Center, Spaulding and computer science students at [The Ohio State University](#) created the heroin addiction recovery application for Android smart phones. This app helps recovering heroin addicts combat craving, which occurs when the pleasure-seeking part of an addict's brain – "squirrel brain" – is triggered and blurs the consequences of actions. This way, prompt help and guidance are available from the technology they're already carrying in their pockets.

The recovering heroin addict can load up to 10 names of family, friends, counselors and other trusted supporters to their recovery circle screen. This group can receive instant texts during trigger times when temptation occurs and the likelihood of relapse is high, or simply when words of encouragement are needed.

"The patient can also push a panic button which sends a message immediately to the entire support circle that says, 'I need help and I need it now'," Lander said. At this point, all other features are bypassed and the distress text is sent.

Other features of the app include: monitoring of mood, stress level and desire to use heroin; tracking accumulated days of sobriety and coins collected as awards for sobriety milestones; and motivational stories and testimonials from recovered addicts to assist with staying clean and resisting the urge to use.

Spaulding sees great potential for this app. According to a recent report released by the [U.S. Drug Enforcement Administrations](#), heroin use is growing faster than any other illegal drug with overdose deaths at their highest in a decade. Nationally, the number of overdose deaths more than tripled to 8,260 in 2013 from 2,402 deaths in 2007, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

"I'd like to add a GPS feature that lets you know a meeting is close and allows app users to identify their own trigger spots so that a menu pops up and asks 'How are you doing?'," Spaulding said.

Spaulding says the technology could be used in other situations in which a support system would be beneficial, such as depression, chronic pain, fatigue and stress.

She said addiction counselors have welcomed the use of the app because it helps them not worry as much about how their patients are doing on the days they're not in their offices.

Click [here](#) to download the heroin addiction recovery application for free.

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