Increasing National Footprint

Sober Peer Expands National Footprint to Florida and Georgia

Sober Peer's breakthrough technology platform and mobile app are now available to residents of Florida and Georgia. Substance use rehabilitation centers in eight cities in Florida and Georgia are now utilizing these tools to help people move from addiction to sobriety.

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Capitol Ideas

Partnering with State Governments to Stretch Resources and Improve Outcomes

Sober Peer is busy forming partnerships with state governments around the nation to help treat people with substance use disorders. In recent months, meetings to deploy our platforms have been held with a wide range of government officials in more than 20 states, including Texas, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Nebraska.

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Georgia On My Mind

Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr Speaks with Sober Peer

As part of a monthly interview series with key government leaders, Sober Peer connected with Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr to talk about the impact of the COVID-19 virus and other key issues. Since taking office in 2016, Carr has made it a priority to combat opioid misuse, gang violence, human trafficking, elder abuse and consumer fraud.

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A Comprehensive View

Sober Peer Helps Treat My Students in Real Time

By Michael Hope, Director—Hoving Home, Pasadena, California

The dashboard is my favorite Sober Peer feature. It gives me a quick, real-time view of a student's progress at any point in time.

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Right In Front of You

The Answer To Treatment During COVID-19—Our Mobile App

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Reaching Those In Need

Healthcare Providers Are Our Financial Partners

Sober Peer fully supports our local provider partners as a payer with funding to reach those in need. We have a variety of plans and pricing options to fit your needs and approach to treating clients. We've outlined our pricing below and are happy to talk you through the best to implement Sober Peer in your practice.

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Sober Peer Needs You

We are recruiting licensed counselors and certified coaches to join our network. Email us at info@soberpeer.com for details.

Any Questions?

Changing the Game

“Conversations” is a regular USA feature that enlists thoughtful leaders in the addiction and recovery sector to answer questions and share insights on important and emerging topics. In this issue we talk with Mark Cole, chief operating officer of Sober Peer.

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Sober Peer Expands National Footprint to Florida and Georgia

Technology Platform Uses Behavioral Science to Treat More People with Substance Use Disorders, Speed Recovery and Lower Costs

Sober Peer’s breakthrough technology platform and mobile app are now available to residents of Florida and Georgia. Substance use rehabilitation centers in eight cities in Florida and Georgia are now utilizing these tools to help people move from addiction to sobriety.

According to the US National Survey on Drug Use and Health, approximately 2.49 million people in Florida and 1 million people in Georgia need treatment for substance use disorders, but aren’t receiving it.

“We are entering two states where almost 3.5 million people are at risk but aren’t receiving care for their substance use disorders,” says Ed DeShields, Sober Peer’s founder and chief executive officer.

“Because Sober Peer’s technology platform combines behavioral science with a mobile app, we can reach the entire population of Florida and Georgia and produce better outcomes at less cost than traditional forms of care.”

In Florida, the centers are located in Jacksonville, Tallahassee, Pensacola, Fort Myers, Sanford and Davie. In Georgia, the rehabilitation centers are in Columbus and Dublin. During the next several weeks, the company plans to announce additional states where its technology will be used in treatment centers.

Also, anyone with addiction issues or their friends and family can download the mobile app for free. Sober Peer is also recruiting counselors and coaches to join our national network and we pay providers to provide care to recovering substance users enrolled on our platform. To find out more, contact us at soberpeer.com.

Sober Peer’s “Behavioral Science, Made Mobile” approach is using three fundamental ideas to transform addiction recovery:

Artificial Intelligence to Analyze Data. Our technology tracks up to 500 pieces of behavioral data daily for each patient. This data is analyzed and presented as simple, actionable advice on a personalized dashboard that tracks each patient’s progress, enabling a counselor or coach to gain deeper insights that will lead to a faster and lasting recovery.

Leveraging Smart Phones for Care. More people receive treatment because smart phones remove obstacles such as distance from providers, cost of service and the stigma of admitting a substance use problem. Clients also receive continuous care by engaging with their treatment professional via our smart phone app. Also, because healthcare providers use the app to manage patient’s care remotely, the app can help treated patients during the COVID-19 crisis.

Making Professional Help Affordable. 89 percent of the 20 million Americans with substance use issues don’t seek treatment. Sober Peer’s app improves patient engagement, lowers the cost of treatment and significantly expands a professional’s capacity to serve more clients.

“Our technology delivers the science behind the behavior of people who practice risky drug and alcohol use,” DeShields says. “Unlike electronic health records, this unique tool can measure and identify behavior patterns to help each person receive treatment. We have a deep sense of urgency about helping millions of people receive treatment by overcoming key barriers, such as distance, cost and the stigma of addiction.”

As part of the initial launch last year, Sober Peer tested its platform at 22 addiction recovery sites in 16 states. Extensive testing confirms that the platform is helping treatment professionals identify core issues faster and speed up the recovery process. 81 percent of counselors told us that our platform fundamentally reshaped their relationships for the better and 66% reported a deeper understanding of their clients.
Partnering with State Governments to Stretch Resources and Improve Outcomes

Sober Peer is busy forming partnerships with state governments around the nation to help treat people with substance use disorders. In recent months, meetings to deploy our platform have been held with a wide range of government officials in more than 20 states, including Texas, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Nebraska.

“We want to be partners with state governments by providing access to a digital network to serve their clients,” said Bill Dudley, Sober Peer’s government affairs liaison. “By engaging directly with state leaders, we can more easily reach their citizens who will get the most benefit from new mobile health technology.”

State budgets have been crushed by loss of tax revenue and expenses related to the pandemic. There are a number of options for state government to utilize Sober Peer for stretching their budgets and improving treatment outcomes, including:

- **Treatment Centers.** State-run facilities use the platform for both in-patient and outpatient services. Through the mobile app, we help citizens who don’t have a treatment provider nearby or start treatments when there aren’t any in-patient spaces available. Post-treatment follow-up and support through Sober Peer help sustain hard-won recovery progress.

- **Family & Children’s Services.** Nearly half of all families who receive public assistance have some kind of substance use issue that impact the household. Sober Peer offers a support tool for families to learn how to engage with family members’ addiction issues.

- **Health and Human Services.** Our subscription can paid as a reimbursable expense for people that qualify for Medicaid.

- **Military Veterans Services.** Many veterans struggle with addiction issues and Sober Peer offers a simple way to stop connected and provide continuous care as an outpatient telehealth solution that can be used individually or a group support tool.

- **Jail/Drug Court.** As the costs of incarceration continue to skyrocket, our platform offers a simple, secure way to engage persons in diversion programs, as well as probation and parole. This geo-fencing function and cognitive behavioral tools serve as a digital ankle bracelet for managing probation/treatment.

“Considering social distancing and other COVID-19 concerns, both states and healthcare providers understand that mobile technology is tailor-made for their clients, who use smart phone apps for everything,” says Dudley. “It’s a tool that provides greater behavioral insight much more quickly and reduces the need for in-person visits while giving healthcare professionals more time to treat more people.”
Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr is one of the nation’s leaders in fighting substance abuse. As part of his commitment to help people with substance use disorders, he established and leads the Statewide Opioid Task Force—which has more than 450 members.

In an op-ed published in September 2019 in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Attorney General Carr said an estimated 180,000 Georgians are living with an opioid-use disorder. He wrote: “Each number that makes up this total represents an opportunity to reach someone who is struggling, and we must do all we can to support them and their families.”

Sober Peer recently asked Attorney General Carr to address how the COVID-19 virus is having an impact on substance abuse treatment and how the state is continuing to address the opioid issue.

“The coronavirus has altered the way we live, work and raise our families,” he said. “Our Statewide Opioid Task Force also had to adjust given the unique set of circumstances.

“We knew our work could not stop during the pandemic, because we knew that an increase in substance abuse could likely be an unintended consequence of social distancing requirements.”

Carr said the state hosted a virtual meeting of the Statewide Opioid Task Force to hear from experts on the following questions:

1. How is the Coronavirus pandemic affecting those with substance abuse issues—and specifically opioid abuse?
2. What steps are organizations taking to address substance abuse issues—and specifically opioid abuse—during the Coronavirus pandemic?
3. What resources are available to those who are battling substance abuse—and specifically opioid abuse—during the Coronavirus pandemic?
4. Should we be aware of as it relates to substance abuse—and specifically opioid abuse—and the Coronavirus?

The attorney general’s office has received an update from many members on these categories. “We continue to help support our members as we fight addiction and help those in long-term recovery,” Carr said.

The Attorney General understands people fighting substance abuse have several obstacles to overcome. But also knows there are solutions. In his op-ed, he provided these encouraging words:

“Stigma has a way of silencing those who are in pain and stripping people by making them socially invisible. More importantly, stigma often keeps people from asking for help.

“If we can take positive steps towards ending the stigma associated with opioid-use disorder, we can lift up our neighbors who are struggling with addiction, give a voice to all who are silently suffering and lend our hand to all that so desperately need our support.”
by Michael Hope, Director at Hoering Home, Pasadena, California

The dashboard is my favorite Sober Peer feature. It gives me a quick, real-time view of a student’s progress at any point in time.

We began using Sober Peer in August 2019. Since then, our six counselors and coaches have used it to treat approximately 60 women with drug and alcohol issues.

As the director of a substance use rehabilitation facility for women, my staff and I need timely information to be effective counselors. Before I speak with a student, I can check their dashboard to determine their progress on the severity of their addictions, their psychosocial profile and their faith. It gives me a deeper understanding of each student’s behavior, saves time and makes me more effective.

The students begin each day answering a short questionnaire on Sober Peer that provides a comprehensive view of their lives. They answer questions about their employment and financial situations, family life, mental and physical health, legal issues and use of alcohol, drugs and other substances. It helps me determine how their recovery is going.

In addition to the three main indicators already mentioned, we can see their progress in five key behaviors: discovering hope, deciding to change, finding purpose, eating healthy and thinking differently. If I notice they aren’t engaged in regular exercise, or seem to be having a bad day, I can check these measurements to see if there is a pattern of behavior that we need to address.

Before we used Sober Peer, we maintained paper files on each student. We didn’t have any information about any student other than our own fact gathering process. It often took several months and many meetings with each student to find the information we gather every day.

Now, it’s different. Let’s say there’s an argument between two women. Both may suffer from child abuse issues; words are exchanged about a topic and tempers flare. I can quickly check Sober Peer to understand behavior patterns from each woman to probe their angst and bring a deeper level of understanding to the conversation. I can treat them more quickly and effectively.

The information we get now help me bring a different level of treatment to each student. And that means we can help more people recover and get back their lives. And that’s what it’s all about.
The Answer To Treatment During COVID-19—Our Mobile App

Even though the nation is beginning to resume regular activities, millions of people will avoid visiting public places for a long period. This includes people with substance use disorders. This means people needing treatment will likely avoid medical buildings and treatment centers where they will come in contact with others—especially those they feel could be infected.

Sober Peer’s mobile app can help fill the needs of patients, healthcare providers and the states with virtual counseling. “It’s the best way to maintain treatment and also reach out to others that haven’t been getting treatment,” says Ed DeShields, Sober Peer’s founder and chief executive officer. “At the same time, it lowers the cost of treatment while providing new patients for providers.”

Sober Peer can play a significant role in filling the treatment gap. Here’s why:

Social Distancing. Many substance use treatment centers closed temporarily in recent weeks and others aren’t taking new patients as they scramble to make offices safe. At the same time, too much free time is causing relapses and traditional telemedicine has been inadequate to meet this growing need. Our platform allows for individual and group telehealth sessions to continue care.

Financial Stress. More than 30 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since March, causing financial stress for many people and making traditional care unaffordable for many people. The loss of jobs and income for so many Americans means healthcare professionals are treating fewer patients. Many other families have lost their medical insurance. Our platform offers a simple, affordable monthly subscription that makes treatment accessible to all.

No Room at the Inn. On top of these trends, many long-term residential care facilities may not have the capacity to admit new patients. Others worry that new patients may not have been tested for the virus or are asymptomatic. Our mobile app allows treatment centers to start virtual treatment and start treatment and a space in the facility opens up.

State Budgets Are Being Cut. The closing of businesses across the nation and lower revenues for several industries, such as airlines, energy and hospitality, are causing huge shortfalls in tax revenues for all states. Governors are cutting their budgets now and for the next fiscal year, which will mean lower funding to treat people with substance use disorders. Our technology allows each counselor to serve more patients—both through telehealth and our behavioral science that makes each interaction more efficient and effective.

“Our technology is the answer healthcare professionals need—both short- and long-term—to help their patients and grow their practice,” DeShields says. “Together, we can help millions of people receive treatment by overcoming the barriers of distance, cost and the stigma of addiction.”
Healthcare Providers Are Our Financial Partners

Sober Peer is designed to be affordable, scalable, and to complement your existing business model. We have a variety of plans and pricing options to fit your needs and approach to treating clients. We’ve outlined our pricing below and are happy to talk you through the best way to implement Sober Peer in your practice.

But did you know that we will pay you when a person needing treatment finds you using the Sober Peer app? Each day, we have persons with substance use disorder and friends and family members downloading the Sober Peer app who need to connect with a treatment professional for advice and support. By joining the Sober Peer network, we will publish your profile to our app users and pay you for services when an app user selects you as their provider!

To schedule a time to meet with a Sober Peer representative, email support@soberpeer.com.
Changing the Game

Mark Cole is Sober Peer’s chief operating officer. He previously was chief executive officer of HLP, a social enterprise technology company that helped more than 750,000 families achieve and sustain homeownership through its collaboration platforms. Mark has more than 25 years of experience as a leader of a wide variety of national organizations helping people overcome obstacles—making him a perfect fit for Sober Peer.

Why did you join Sober Peer?

We have entered a new era where technology is fundamentally reshaping service delivery and outcomes. The scale and severity of the addiction epidemic is staggering and we need a part of it helping tackle the problem and bringing hope to these individuals and families. We’ve built a unique digital health platform that delivers the science beyond the behavior of persons who practice risky drug and alcohol use. Our mobile app empowers people to be fully engaged in their recovery and receive continuous, evidence-based care that promotes better outcomes. We are also closing the gap that has prevented millions of people from getting treatment by overcoming key barriers, such as distance, cost, and the stigmas of addiction.

How is the COVID-19 crisis accelerating innovation?

This crisis has made incorporating technology contenderily necessary. It’s the perfect tool for people who can’t see their healthcare providers face-to-face, as our app helps them maintain constant contact with a healthcare provider versus waiting weeks for an appointment. The impact has been profound as people realize how much time is wasted with traditional approaches and that many clients are more comfortable using their smart phone to engage. While the pandemic is also cutting state governments billions of dollars, our technology saves them money by reaching at-risk patients to maintain their care. Sober Peer promotes better outcomes for these patients while saving governments expenses associated with jail, welfare and healthcare and other services.

Why is Sober Peer’s technology a “game changer”?

Each day, we collect up to 500 behavioral science data points—a call from Sober Signals—from each patient. Using artificial intelligence, we analyze that data and turn it into simple, actionable advice. The data for each patient is summarized on a personal dashboard that measures and tracks their progress, giving healthcare providers new and better insights. Psychologists, counselors and coaches can also rely on recommendations generated by our artificial intelligence system to help treat patients with more and better information than in the past. Our technology capabilties also enable continuous care through text chat, voice and video sessions.

Discuss Sober Peer’s role of an intermediary in the treatment process.

We’re using our technology to bring together all the stakeholders in the recovery sector to collaborate on creating lasting solutions—processes with substance use disorder, treatment professionals, government, researchers, trade & professional groups, concerned persons, and advocates. This allows us to engage thought leaders, policy makers, and practitioners to incorporate best practices and innovations into Sober Peer.

In addition, we are recruiting counselors and coaches across the country to join our network. We pay member providers to care for recovering substance users enrolled on our platform. Our community includes people in recovery, certified peer coaches, licensed counselors, crisis teams and other mental health and substance use providers. Our technology plays a critical role in closing the treatment gap as a counselor can serve up to 10 times as many clients with greater effectiveness.

Why are you optimistic that Sober Peer can work?

The results from our initial deployment to 22 centers in 16 states are quite impressive. Extensive testing confirms that the platform is helping patients get to the core issues faster and speeding up the recovery process—41% of counselors said our platform fundamentally transformed their patient relationships for the better, 65% reported a deeper understanding of their patients, and 87% reported post-treatment support greatly improved. These outcomes are all great reasons to be optimistic.