

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

[14:04] Elektra Panthar: Hello everyone.

Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time.

A little explanation about this service.

Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.

Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.

You will see the transcription in local chat.

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] Ṙ· ȯ· ṡ· ṡ· u̇· k̇· l̇· v̇ (rossy.lilliehook): applause

[14:07] Bixyl Shuftan claps

[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 to!

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

[14:20] Gentle Heron: AA = Alcoholics Anonymous

[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 Mistwallow: 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 Mistwallow: 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 Gecko (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] Μαῖικῆ Vixē η (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] Μαῖικῆ Vixē η (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

[14:41] Mook Wheeler: nods. Thank you.

[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

[14:51] 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

[14:51] ΜαjικVixΞη (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 griefier 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

[14:52] 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

[14:54] 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.

[14:55] Gentle Heron: Thank you for that Bixyl.

[14:55] Bixyl Shuftan: and welcome Gentle :-)

[14:53] Xaria Mistwallow: Twitch would work as well, but so far LL seems to want it to die.

[14:55] Bixyl Shuftan: Xaria, I don't think Twitch allows broadcasts from SL

[14:55] Xaria Mistwallow: they do

Just as long as you don't show sex, drugs, etc

[14:56] ΜαjικVixΞη (majikvixen.lorefield): Thanks for the clarification. I agree with you. But yes, the public may not quite understand the nature of SL, which is why I think it needs more good PR like these helpful events, thank you.

[14:56] Bixyl Shuftan: Last I heard, they wouldn't allow broadcasts from SL, period. It's possible they changed their policy recently.

[14:59] ΜαjικVixΞη (majikvixen.lorefield): Ah, Bixyl. They may have... or at least, the Lab Gab stream with Strawberry Linden (who used to be Strawberry Singh) seems to infer

[14:55] Gentle Heron: Question- Do you have some suggestions of what Human Resources programs through employers can do to help with this problem for those working from home?

[14:56] 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.

[14:58] Gentle Heron: Question- Are people with disabilities more likely to become addicts than people without disabilities? Why or why not?

[14:59] 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

[14:59] Xaria Mistwallow: think it's rather too broad, there are so many different disabilities which means so many different outcomes

[15:00] Gentle Heron: Right Xaria.

[15:00] Majikvixen (majikvixen.lorefield): Before this pandemic, close friends have kind of suggested that SL may be an addiction. May very well be, but at least it could be viewed as a healthier addiction

[15:01] Axel-the-fox (axelfoxthefoxyfluff): At least I think it is kinda better than drugs or such.
:trigger warning:

[15:02] Xaria Mistwallow: rather [be] addicted to gaming or worlds like SL than being addicted to drugs or alcohol

There is a huge addiction problem in gaming regarding lootboxes and monetization. It's a money grab that even gets pushed on very young children

[15:03] 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

[15:02] Gentle Heron: Jim Fixx may have been addicted to jogging

[15:03] 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

[15:04] Mook Wheeler: All the grandmas said it first: "Moderation in all things" ;)

[15:04] Majikvixen (majikvixen.lorefield) nod nods to Mook

[15:04] Gentle Heron nods to Mook

[15:06] Elektra Panthar: CM: Thank you everyone

[15:05] Majikvixen (majikvixen.lorefield): Thank you for the discussion!

[15:05] Rossy.lilliehook (rossy.lilliehook): Thank you

[15:05] Mook Wheeler: Thank you!

[15:05] Xaria Mistwallow: thank you

[15:05] 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 >>