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For Release: March 13, 2007

Software Helps College Students Reduce Drinking and Change Attitudes About Alcohol

Study Reported in March 2007 Issue of Prevention Science

Alcohol consumption among college students is a growing concern, especially around Spring break. However, a new study finds that an online program (www.e-CHUG.com) can not only help reduce alcohol consumption, but also change students' views about what is considered normal drinking.

The study, reported in the March 2007 issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Prevention Science*, found that students who received personalized feedback from e-CHUG reported a drop in drinking levels twice as quickly as those who did not get any feedback. The study was conducted by Scott Walters, Ph.D., Amanda Vader, MPH, and T. Robert Harris, Ph.D. of the University of Texas School of Public Health.

"The program asks students a series of questions about their drinking. Based on their responses, it assembles a customized profile of how much the student is drinking and spending on alcohol, how many calories they are consuming, and a variety of different risk factors. The program also provides information on how the student's drinking fits in with other college students. It can be a real surprise to some students to find out they're in the 95th percentile in terms of their drinking. It just never occurred to them," explains Walters.

"The study involved 350 college students who were randomized to receive or not receive feedback. All students completed follow-up assessments at 8 and 16 weeks. Compared to students who did not receive feedback, there was a significant drop at 8 weeks in terms of drinks per week among students who did receive the feedback. Although both groups decreased their drinking over 16 weeks, the feedback group showed a much earlier reduction in drinking. The results suggest that e-CHUG accelerated a decline in heavy drinking. More importantly, students' attitudes about what was considered normal drinking also changed as a result of the program. After receiving feedback, students were much more accurate in estimating how their drinking compared with others, and students who were more accurate in estimating their drinking relative to other students also showed the largest reductions in drinking behavior," Walters said.

e-CHUG, which stands for "electronic Check-Up to Go," is managed by the San Diego State University Research Foundation. The program is customized and site licensed to individual colleges. More than 300 college campuses in 42 states use e-CHUG. Students are often encouraged to use it by colleges during orientation sessions for incoming freshmen or if a student commits an infraction of the campus alcohol policy. The program can estimate blood alcohol levels (BAC) based on personal information and drinking histories.