Thesis Abstract – Llew Mills University of Sydney

Thesis Title: Ignorance is Bliss: Removing information of timing of dose reductions to reduce withdrawal symptoms.

Abstract: Most of the research into the role of expectancies in addiction has focused on how expectancies contribute to the positive, euphoric effects of drugs. Few however have explored the role that expectancies play in withdrawal symptoms. We propose a model where the environmental stimuli and the accompanying knowledge signalling the absence of the drug represents a S– (in contrast to the S+ that signals the presence of the drug and a positive placebo effect), which elicits a series of expectancies about the somatic, behavioural and environmental consequences of that drug’s absence. These expectancies can significantly contribute to the maintenance of drug behaviour by mimicking or augmenting physiological withdrawals. The first study of this thesis will seek to prove the existence of this expectancy withdrawal syndrome by showing that self-reported withdrawals will be higher in a group of abstinent caffeine drinkers who have been primed to expect them than in a group who have not. The second study will then seek to show that by removing the information about timing and magnitude of dose reductions that allows smokers on a nicotine-patch-based dose-reduction regimen to generate an expectancy of withdrawals, total withdrawal symptoms can be significantly reduced compared to a group on the same reduction regimen who are aware of dose reductions.