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PHARMACY
the Heart of our Community

ALCOHOL IDENTIFICATION AND BRIEF ADVICE (IBA)

Your health challenge

- 6,490 alcohol-related deaths in England in 2012[1]
- 19% increase in alcohol-related deaths since 2001[1]
- 1m+ hospital admissions related to alcohol in 2012/13[1]
- £3.5bn annual NHS spend on alcohol-related conditions[1]

Fact: Only 6.4% of dependent drinkers access treatment in the UK[1]

How can community pharmacies help?

Pharmacy teams can offer alcohol interventions and screening services using accredited tools such as AUDIT-C to assess drinking in a wide range of patient and demographic groups.

Where problem drinking is identified this can be followed by advice and follow up, support materials or referral to local specialist alcohol teams.

Results from pharmacy services and campaigns in the past have included:

- four out of every 10 customers who took part in a risk assessment service recorded a score which indicated higher risk drinking;[2]
- more than 60% of service users cut back on the number of alcohol units they drank afterwards;[3]
- 52% said pharmacy kits helped them to reduce the number of days they drank on;[3]
- four in five said they had started keeping better track of their drinking;[3]
- 100% of service users were comfortable talking about alcohol in pharmacies; [4] and
- mean Audit-C results reduced in some service users.[4]

1. Alcohol Concern website (www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)
2. Results from Pharmacy London's Alcohol Awareness Service, December 2012 to March 2013
3. Results from Berkshire's 'What's in your glass campaign', January 2013
4. Results from Devon's alcohol identification and brief advice service, 2011

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What the experts say

Those interviewed perceived the service to be informative and a good idea, particularly for individuals drinking at higher risk levels. A number of respondents also reported an increased awareness of units in different drinks and recommended limits, and of other lifestyle services offered at the pharmacy.
Service Evaluators – Wirral[5]

"This kind of informal approach is so different to what GPs do."
Rekha Shah, Secretary of Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster LPC[6]

5. Comments from 'Understanding and optimising an identification/brief advice (IBA) service about alcohol in the community pharmacy setting', September 2012
6. Comment from an interview on the Pan London Alcohol Awareness IBA Service, June 2014

For contact details of your LPC please visit lpc-online.org.uk

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Potential benefits of a community pharmacy alcohol intervention service

1. Reduce harmful drinking in your local population

Pharmacy alcohol campaigns have been shown to lead to behaviour changes in some people accessing them with reductions in drinking seen. This would have health benefits, and may lead to fewer people living with preventable ill health or dying prematurely from alcohol-related conditions.

2. Reduce pressure on GPs, A&E and other healthcare providers

Sometimes people who are worried about their alcohol consumption visit their GPs; so if receptionists could refer them to local pharmacists this may ease pressure on practices. Perhaps more importantly, with a plan in place to manage their alcohol intake, fewer people will end up with alcohol-related complications and health problems, reducing pressure on practices and on A&E and hospital services.

3. Save NHS money and resources

If alcohol dependence and harmful drinking can be reduced in people accessing this service then those people are likely to have fewer alcohol-related complications which reduces future NHS spend on services.

Fact: for every £1 invested in specialist alcohol treatment, £5 is saved on health, welfare and crime costs[1].

4. Target hard-to-reach drinking groups

Community pharmacies are accessible to vulnerable patients and populations, with many located in deprived areas and communities. This means they can more easily access some groups of people. Pharmacy teams may also come into contact with people who are not registered with GP practices or accessing other health services.

How might your local service work?

Trained pharmacy teams can offer a variety of alcohol interventions and screening services using accredited tools such as AUDIT-C to assess drinking. Screening can begin with quizzes or scratch cards to help engage people in a less formal way.

The service could target as many people as possible, or focus on specific groups such as men and women aged 18-30 years, or people with diabetes. Commissioners are advised to think broadly though as alcohol support can be needed in all areas and groups of people.

Where problem drinking is identified, pharmacy teams can offer people advice and support as appropriate. It is estimated that for every 8 people in the higher risk levels who receive advice on their alcohol consumption, one person will reduce their drinking to a much lower level as a result.[7]

7. Brief interventions for alcohol problems: a meta-analytic review of controlled investigations in treatment-seeking and non-treatment-seeking populations, 2002

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If the person gets a low risk score then brief advice may be given, for example to explain daily benchmarks, what a unit of alcohol is and how to identify how many units are present in the person's preferred alcoholic drinks. They may be supplied with a leaflet to support the verbal information.

If they get a medium risk score a more comprehensive intervention can be offere. The customer can again be given information leaflets and they may be invited to return to the pharmacy at a later date to talk about their drinking. A note sent to the GP, with their consent, may be relevant at this point also.

If someone is found to be at high risk then, with their consent, a referral to the specialist local alcohol service could be made. Some services also allow for a member of the pharmacy team to contact the person or local alcohol service after a period of time to 'follow up' if the person consents to this.

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