

Screening and Brief Interventions for Alcoholism

SCREEN:

At each visit, ask about alcohol use:

- How many drinks per week?
- Maximum drinks per occasion in past month?

Use CAGE questions to probe for alcohol problems:

- Have you ever tried to Cut down on your drinking?
- Do you get Annoyed when people talk about your drinking?
- Do you feel Guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had an Eye-opener? (A drink first thing in the morning)

SCREEN IS POSITIVE IF:

- Consumption is > 14 drinks/week or > 4 drinks/occasion (men)
- Consumption is > 7 drinks/week or > 3 drinks/occasion (women)
- CAGE score > 1

THEN ASSESS FOR:

- *Medical problems:* e.g., blackouts; depression; hypertension; trauma; abdominal pain; liver dysfunction; sexual problems; sleep disorders
- *Laboratory:* elevated GGTP or other LFTs; elevated MCV; +BAC
- *Behavioral problems:* work; family; school; accidents
- *Alcohol dependence:* 3+ on CAGE or one or more of: compulsion to drink; impaired control; withdrawal symptoms; increased tolerance; relief drinking

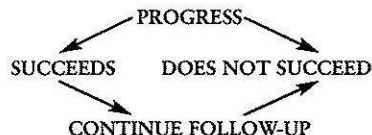
GIVE SPECIFIC FEEDBACK TO PATIENT, THEN ADVISE — FIRM BUT EMPATHIC:

If diagnosed as at risk:

- Advise patient of risk
- Advise abstinence/moderation
- Set drinking goals
- Schedule follow-up to discuss progress

If diagnosed as alcohol dependent:

- Advise patient of objective evidence
- Advise on plan of action
- Assess acute risk of intoxication/withdrawal
- Medical/psychiatric comorbidities
- Agree on plan of action



PLAN OF ACTION:

- Refer the patient to an addiction medicine specialist for formal assessment and development of a treatment plan.
- Educate the patient, significant other/s, and family about the nature of addiction, the effectiveness of treatment, and the prospects for recovery.
- Remain engaged in care of the patient by addressing medical issues as needed and supporting the patient's commitment to the treatment process.

For more information, see *Principles of Addiction Medicine, Third Edition*, (AW Graham, TK Schultz, M Mayo-Smith & RK Ries), published by ASAM, 2002.

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