

Lessons learnt in prioritising alcohol misuse with complex patients

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Background: Alcohol misuse causes a high burden of disease and has significant social and economic consequences. In 2022, 1.5 million Queenslanders (36.4%) exceeded the risky drinking guideline [1]. Alcohol and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Alcohol Guidelines are discussed as a key risk factor within the Queensland Way to Wellness (WTW) service. Patients report alcohol misuse and minimise its contribution to their overall health and wellbeing. Following best practice alcohol intervention has proved challenging for staff due to the wide acceptance and central role alcohol plays in people's lives.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention: The WTW service has supported over 4500 patients awaiting elective surgery to optimise their health and wellbeing. Alcohol consumption is addressed through assessment, brief advice in line with clinical guidelines, a discussion of personal goals and actions and referral. 30% of WTW participants are identified as at risk for alcohol. The service has significantly invested in staff training, peer problem-solving, tailored communication and external expert advice. The service approaches alcohol holistically, highlighting its impact on weight, nutrition, mental health and surgical outcomes.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation: Alcohol is continuously raised as a challenging area for staff and patients. Staff report difficulties in remaining neutral and compliant with the model of care. Patients report challenges in breaking alcohol consumption patterns when it is so engrained in their routine.

Conclusion and Next Steps: Patients and staff are more accepting of addressing alcohol consumption when it is framed as part of a broader approach to health and wellbeing. Challenges and learnings will be discussed.

References:

1. Queensland Government. The Health of Queenslanders, Report of the Chief Health Officer Queensland. [internet]. Brisbane: Department of Health, 2022 [cited 25 May 2023]. Available from: <https://www.choreport.health.qld.gov.au/>

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