

Isle of Wight Primary Care Trust

Response to the DOH Consultation Document 'National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy'

The IW Primary Care Trust welcomes the consultation document and the opportunity to make comments.

IW Primary Care Trust representatives have met briefly with key stakeholders to discuss the consultation document and the following comments reflect that discussion.

The comments do not follow the consultation documents questions but do cover the themes of the model of harm reduction, the style of the strategy and the views of local stakeholders.

The Primary Care Trust is concerned that alcohol misuse is a major contributor to health and social problems and yet has not received the priority attention it deserves. It has been disappointing that the Drug Action Teams have not been required to include alcohol services as part of their remit to co-ordinate and monitor.

Primary Care is a key player in supporting harm reduction but cannot work in isolation. Effective interventions will need to include education, social and leisure services to ensure a co-ordinated and consistent approach.

Harm Reduction – The PCT supports the harm reduction model in that it encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions. Brief and effective interventions need to be available to support individuals and also a tolerance for those individuals who choose to continue to take risks with their alcohol consumption.

The consultation document asks for evidence of effectiveness. While not able to offer specific instances it is widely recognised that the drink driving campaign has been successful. Lessons could be learned from that approach although clearly it has taken a long time to become effective.

Research suggests brief interventions by primary care professionals can modify individuals drinking behaviour. This could be further explored to identify if practitioners, other than GPs, can make the same impact.

Style of the Consultation Strategy

The IWPCT considered the consultation document to be rather judgemental concerning young people and alcohol abuse misuse. The facts would suggest that, whoever consumes excess alcohol there is potential for harm to themselves or others. We are aware of no greater risks for young people. The response or intervention, to different client groups, does on the other hand need tailoring to meet needs appropriately.

The consultation document appears to have an emphasis on controlling and limiting crime associated with alcohol misuse. The PCT recognises the cost and impact of crime but would expect to see more consideration given to the prevention, support and treatment of alcohol misuse in the final strategy.

IWPCT and Stakeholder view

The PCT is concerned that there is still little known evidence of the extent of the problem. There are indications but it is anticipated these underestimate the size of the problem. The PCT is concerned that, without additional capacity and resources allocated to this issue, the longer-term benefits of intervention will not be possible.

The PCT would support a harm reduction strategy that:

- Recognises alcohol misuse as largely a symptom of other social and health related issues
- Encourages individuals, not the community, to take responsibility for their own behaviour
- Encourages families, agencies and work places to confront alcohol misuse, and stop, supporting the misuse
- Identifies effective brief and early interventions in primary care models to provide information and education
- Identifies effective evidence based treatment models for those with longer term problems
- Recognises that alcohol misuse is at least as damaging to health and social systems as illegal substances

IWPCT
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