

I write as a senior staff nurse on a gastro/liver unit at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. I have a keen interest in the effects of alcohol on the patients I nurse and I also see opportunity after opportunity to offer preventative help to patients pass us by. For me there are 2 very different needs/groups which need to be addressed in the hospital setting.

1) there are the patients who are admitted with very obvious alcohol related problems, such as cirrhosis. These patients have very complex health care needs and need to be nursed in specialist units, such as the one I work on. Hospitals need an alcohol team consisting of, at least 1 doctor, 1 psychiatrist a councillor and a team of specialist nurses. Unlike most specialist nurses it is vital that this team educate the staff working on the shop floor, sharing their knowledge and improving all staff awareness of alcohol related issues.. Hospitals run 24 hrs a day and you need nurses and doctors who know about these issues everywhere, not just in a specialist team. The team, however do need to work with alcohol dependant patients to address detox issues, maintenance of abstinence and support networks and treatment centres for these patients.

2)Patients who are admitted with not alcohol related problems but where alcohol is often the underlying cause or problem. Many of these patients go unnoticed initially but go on to develop much more serious problems, further down the line. If we can address the alcohol issues by adequate assessment/screening and the use of brief intervention in a hospital setting we would reduce the readmission of these patients with gradually worsening symptoms. I have nursed many patients who have initially presented with minor problems such as a Mallory Weiss tear from binge drinking. As a hospital we have failed to address their underlying drink problem and they then go on to develop life threatening liver problems and many do die. If we can train all nurses to offer brief intervention at this early stage could we prevent deaths and the enormous, increasing burden on the nhs? I think so.

I could stand on my soap box for hours going on about this but I've got an essay to do! I don't know if this has been any use to you but, if it has please feel free to contact me with any further question or if more ranting would be at all helpful!!!

Sally Lewis