

Taunton & Somerset NHS Trust

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Our ref:

17th November 2002

Dear Sir

Re: National Alcohol Harm reduction Study

It is difficult for us to present objective evidence of our own experience of the impact of alcohol on health as our current IT systems do not allow easy identification of the relevant data. We can, however, comment on specific issues raised in the health section of the consultation document.

Question 18

There are several reliable tools which can be used in the A&E department to identify patients misusing alcohol. These include the CAGE¹ and Paddington alcohol test² questionnaires. It remains unclear, with conflicting evidence, whether identifying these patients and providing interventions, has any effect on future drinking habits³⁻⁸. For interventions to work the target population probably needs to be highly selected and the intervention tailored to the individual – an approach which is labour intensive and potentially expensive.

Question 21

It is clear that alcohol is implicated in a large proportion of injuries presenting to A&E departments. Glass injuries, however, may not be as common as implied in the question. Rust et al found that of the trauma patients they x-rayed the same proportion underwent imaging for glass foreign bodies whether or not alcohol had been implicated⁹. The use of toughened glass or plastic containers in certain establishments may help to decrease numbers of glass injuries, but this is not tackling the cause of alcohol related assaults. This would require a change in the culture of heavy drinking on Friday and Saturday nights particularly in city centre areas. Practical measures which could help include staggered closing times for pubs and nightclubs, adequate provision of public transport and high profile policing.

One important question, which isn't specifically raised in the consultation document, is the safety of healthcare workers who treat intoxicated patients. Although alcohol harm reduction measures may help to decrease the number of assaults on staff, other preventative measures such as increased training in dealing with violent patients and the presence of police officers in A&E departments should also be considered.

References

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