

# GUIDELINES & PROTOCOLS

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Problem Drinking Part 2 - Brief Intervention

Effective date: April 1, 2011

#### Scope

This guideline provides practitioners with practical information on how to conduct brief intervention for problem drinking in adults (19+) and can be used after a positive screen occurs when using the BC Guideline "Screening for Problem Drinking".\* Once screening is complete and a patient is deemed at-risk, physicians may perform a brief intervention. Problem drinking is a behaviour that can be changed through intervention, and physicians in primary and hospital based care are in a key position to make a difference.<sup>1-5</sup> A study of two minute brief intervention screenings concluded that "self reported patient status at 6 months indicated significant improvements over baseline for illicit drug use and heavy alcohol use."<sup>6</sup>

Brief interventions motivate patients to lower their risk for alcohol related problems and are often successful in addressing other medical issues including medication adherence, weight loss, smoking cessation and dietary habits. If your patient is seeing you for another problem, it may be necessary for screening to be done at the first appointment and intervention done at a follow up appointment.

The following steps are outlined in this guideline:

- Brief intervention
- Follow-up and support

**Diagnostic Code:** 303: Alcohol dependence syndrome  
305: Non dependent use of drugs

Selected interventions should be based on the assessment completed during the screening (See *Problem Drinking Part 1 - Screening and Assessment*). Although alcohol misuse is a spectrum disorder, positive screens will fall into one of three categories.

- 1. At-risk drinking:** Men - 5 or more drinks on one or more days in the last year.  
Women - 4 or more drinks on one or more days in the last year.
- 2. Alcohol abuse:** Patient meets 1 or more DSM IV criteria for abuse in the last 12 months.
- 3. Alcohol dependence:** Patient meets 3 or more DSM IV criteria for dependence in the last 12 months.

Practitioners may wish to use the "Brief Intervention Follow-up Note" provided with this guideline.

\* Significant portions of this guideline were adapted from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), "Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much", A Clinicians' Guide, Updated 2005 Edition, and should be fully acknowledged for developing this useful clinical tool. A full copy of their guideline and reference materials can be found on NIAAA's website at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov>

# Brief Intervention For At-Risk Drinking (no abuse or dependence)

## FIRST - State your conclusion and recommendation clearly:

1. **"You are drinking more than is medically safe. I think your drinking is putting your health at risk and is not good for you."** Relate to patient's concerns and medical findings (anxiety, GERD etc).

2. **"I strongly recommend that you cut down or quit."**

(Note: 15-20 % of alcohol dependent drinkers require in patient withdrawal.<sup>4</sup> See *Problem Drinking Part 3 - Office Based Management of Alcohol Withdrawal and Prescribing Medications for Alcohol Dependence*.)

## SECOND - Gauge readiness to change drinking habits by asking one of the following:

Q: "Are you willing to consider making changes in your drinking?"

Q: "Do you want to do anything about your drinking?"

Q: "How do you feel about my recommendation? Do you have any questions?"

Q: "What do you think? Would that work for you? Does that make sense?"

Is the patient ready to commit to change at this time?

Yes

No

- **Help set a goal:** Cut down to within maximum drinking limits or abstain.
- **Agree on a plan**
  - specific steps.
  - how drinking will be tracked (diary, kitchen calendar).
  - how the patient will manage high-risk situations (e.g., social events).
  - who might be willing to help, such as a spouse or nondrinking friends.
- **Provide educational materials**

See associated documents for additional information (See *Problem Drinking Part 1 - Screening and Assessment*).

- A. Repeat screen regularly (annually / semi-annually).
- B. Link related health concerns to alcohol use.
- **Do not be discouraged:** Ambivalence is common. Your advice has likely prompted a change in your patient's thinking, a positive change in itself. With continued reinforcement, your patient may decide to take action. For now:
  - **Restate your concern** about his or her health.
  - **Encourage reflection:** Ask patients to think about it. Assess the major barriers to change.
  - **Reaffirm your willingness to help** when he or she is ready.
  - **Follow-up and support.**

## Intervention for Alcohol Abuse

Physicians are advised to take the following steps when conducting an intervention:

**1. State your conclusion and recommendation clearly:**

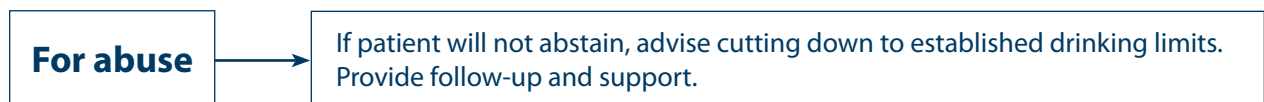
- “I believe that you have an alcohol use disorder. I strongly recommend that you stop drinking and I’m willing to help.”
- Relate to the patient’s concerns and medical findings if present.

**2. Negotiate a goal and develop a plan:**

- Abstaining is the safest course for most patients with alcohol use disorders.
- Patients who have milder forms of abuse or dependence and are unwilling to abstain may be successful at cutting down.

**3. Consider referring to external or community resources:**

- Alcohol and drug counselor, addiction medicine physician.
- Community groups such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).
- See CHARD (Community Health and Resource Directory).



## Intervention for Alcohol Dependence

**For dependence, complete the following in addition to steps 1-3 above**

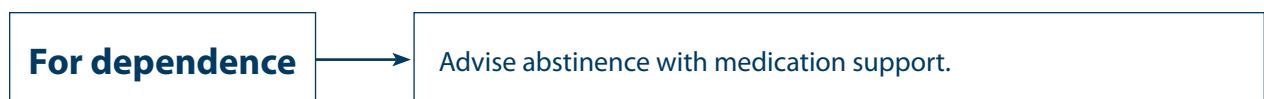
**4. For patients who have dependence:**

- Monitor for withdrawal - 15-20% of alcohol dependent drinkers require in patient withdrawal. Refer to *Problem Drinking Part 3 - Office Based Management of Alcohol Withdrawal and Prescribing Medications for Alcohol Dependence*.

**5. Prescribing Medications for Alcohol Dependence**

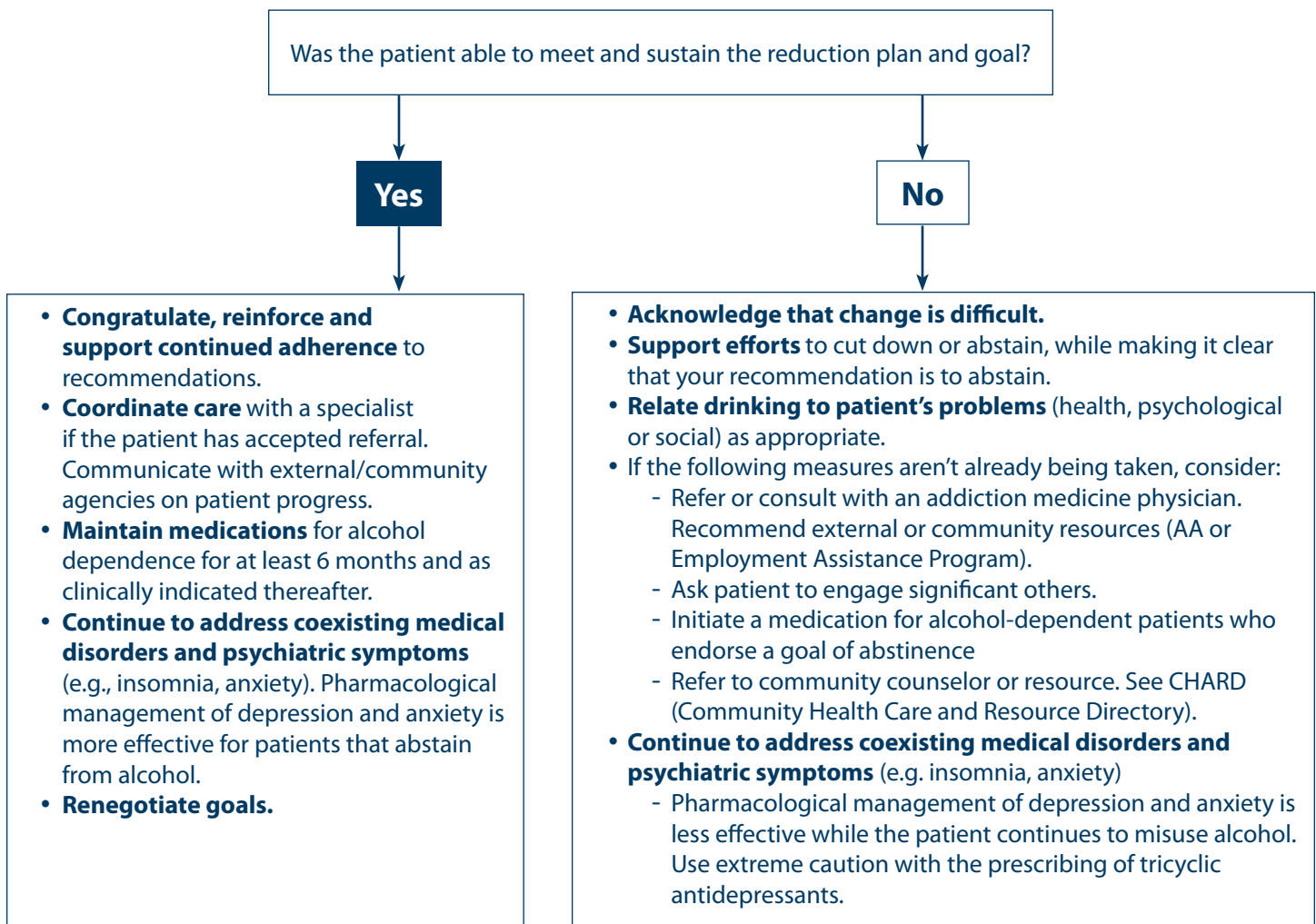
Medication, in conjunction with psychosocial interventions, can play a valuable part in the management of alcohol dependence. See *Part 3 - Office Based Management of Alcohol Withdrawal and Prescribing Medications for Alcohol Dependence* for more information on prescribing medications.

**6. Arrange followup** appointments, including medication management support if needed. See *Problem Drinking Part 3 - Office Based Management of Alcohol Withdrawal and Prescribing Medications for Alcohol Dependence*. To support behaviour change, consider seeing patient at least once every 14 days in initial period.



## Followup and Support

**REMINDER:** Document alcohol use and review goals at each visit (use *Brief Intervention Follow-up Note*). If the patient is receiving a medication for alcohol dependence, medication management support should be provided.



### Rationale

Every health care practitioner will encounter patients with alcohol problems in their practice. It is therefore important that all adolescent and adult patients be screened for problem drinking at some time. In BC as many as one in 10 visits to Vancouver General Hospital Emergency Room was for substance abuse.<sup>7</sup> As well, the number of patients staying at Vancouver General and University of British Columbia (UBC) Hospitals due to substance abuse increased by 44 per cent between 2005 and 2008 (from 1,317 to 1,896).<sup>8</sup> Screening and brief intervention are effective ways to reduce alcohol use as well as reduce acute care utilization. Multiple studies show that:

- Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) can cut hospitalization costs by \$1,000 per person screened and save \$4 for every \$1 invested in trauma center and emergency department screening.<sup>9-11</sup>
- Comparing the results of those who received brief counseling with those who did not, researchers found that counseling resulted in a 40 to 50 per cent decrease in alcohol consumption, a 42 per cent drop in emergency room visits, a 55 per cent decline in motor vehicle crashes, and a 100 per cent reduction in arrests for alcohol or other substance violations.<sup>12</sup>

Research has also shown that many screened patients cut down on their drinking simply because they were asked about their alcohol use; likewise, brief interventions have been shown to effectively reduce alcohol and other drug use.<sup>13</sup>

## References

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12. Grossberg PM, Brown DD, Fleming MF. Brief physician advice for high-risk drinking young adults. *Annals of Family Medicine*. 2004, 2, 474-480.
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## List of Abbreviations

DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders  
GERD: Gastroesophageal reflux disease

## Associated Documents

Brief Intervention Follow-up Note

This guideline is based on scientific evidence current as of the Effective Date.

This guideline was developed by the Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee, approved by the British Columbia Medical Association and adopted by the Medical Services Commission.

A smartphone version of this, and other guidelines, is also available at [www.BCGuidelines.ca](http://www.BCGuidelines.ca)

### The principles of the Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee are to:

- encourage appropriate responses to common medical situations
- recommend actions that are sufficient and efficient, neither excessive nor deficient
- permit exceptions when justified by clinical circumstances

### Contact Information

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## DISCLAIMER

The Clinical Practice Guidelines (the "Guidelines") have been developed by the Guidelines and Protocols Advisory Committee on behalf of the Medical Services Commission. The Guidelines are intended to give an understanding of a clinical problem, and outline one or more preferred approaches to the investigation and management of the problem. The Guidelines are not intended as a substitute for the advice or professional judgment of a health care professional, nor are they intended to be the only approach to the management of clinical problems.

## BRIEF INTERVENTION FOLLOW-UP NOTE

This follow-up note is meant to accompany the Guideline for Problem Drinking [www.BCGuidelines.ca](http://www.BCGuidelines.ca)

DATE	NAME OF PATIENT	TIME SPENT
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**Q2. Heavy drinking days** in the past month:  
(≥ 5 drinks for men / ≥ 4 for women)

	days (positive ≥ 1)
<b>If screen is positive determine weekly</b>	drinks per week (drinking days per week x typical number of drinks)

<b>Working diagnosis:</b>	At-risk drinking	Alcohol abuse	Alcohol dependence
<b>Goal:</b>	Drinking within limits	Abstinence	
<b>Current medications:</b>	Naltrexone	Acamprosate	Disulfiram
	Other (specify):		

**Interval history and progress:**

**Physical examination and laboratory:**

**Current Assessment:**

At-risk drinking	Goals fully met
Alcohol abuse	Goals partially met
Alcohol dependence	Goals not met

**Plan:**

Repeat screening as needed	Patient education about drinking limits				
Recommend drinking within limits		Did the patient agree?	No	Yes	
Recommend abstinence		Did the patient agree?	No	Yes	
Naltrexone 50 mg daily	Acamprosate 666 mg 3 times daily	Disulfiram 250 mg daily			
Thiamine 100 mg IM/PO * (daily x 5)	Acamprosate 333 mg 3 times daily (for moderate renal impairment) (CrCl 30-50 mL/min)				
Other medication/dosage:					
Referral (specify):					

\* Continue thiamine while patient is drinking and continue for 1 week after patient stops

**Followup:**

Additional plan (withdrawal treatment, coexisting conditions, etc) : \_\_\_\_\_

BILLING CODE:

DIAGNOSTIC CODE:

BILLING:

DATE:

DATE: