

Swanswell alcohol awareness groups

Information for health professionals



- Alcohol awareness groups starting in the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust area
- Targeted at people drinking alcohol regularly above recommended limits
- Groups provide mutual support to achieve alcohol limit goals and a simple toolkit to support behaviour change
- Useful follow-up to brief interventions on alcohol at primary care level
- May be linked to delivery of clinical directed enhanced service on alcohol

Alcohol awareness groups

Swanswell, a leading provider of drug and alcohol services, has been commissioned by the Heart of Birmingham Teaching Primary Care Trust to facilitate local groups aimed at abstinence and control of alcohol use.

The first groups will start in Soho, at the Soho Health Centre and Handsworth Wood, St Andrews Community Centre but other groups are planned for Ladywood and Aston.

Further groups will be developed in other areas of the HOB, responding to demand.

Harmful drinkers

The groups are aimed initially at harmful drinkers; those drinking regularly above recommended limits. The Department of Health has identified harmful drinkers as a key target group¹ and it has been noted that face-to-face interventions are effective in supporting changes in drinking behaviour. Harmful drinkers require both information and practical support – Swanswell alcohol awareness groups provide both.

Mutual support with a toolkit for change

The groups comprise two components; the most important is the mutual support provided by group members. It has been noted that individuals attending

self help/mutual aid groups gain as much if not more from giving support to others as they do from receiving support. The groups are designed to ensure time for supportive conversations as well as opportunities to use practical tools for change.

The toolkit, consisting of 5 x 3 inch cards in a plastic wallet and related worksheets, offers an opportunity to explore current behaviour, raise awareness of the benefits of keeping alcohol under control, set goals and sustain behaviour change.

The toolkit follows closely the steps to reduce alcohol consumption promoted in NHS literature. All materials used in the groups are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy principles and practice.

Finally, the group takes a healthy lifestyle approach, encouraging the group to adopt healthy eating habits and to exercise regularly.

Brief interventions

Alcohol awareness groups fit well with brief interventions by health professionals in primary care. A meta-analysis by Poikolainen² suggests that extended brief interventions showed a positive impact on alcohol intake. The seminar report, which contained the findings of the Poikolainen study, concluded that brief interventions were viewed as an effective initiative to reduce alcohol consumption.

Clinically directed enhanced service on alcohol (DES: Alcohol)

Following screening and, if appropriate, the brief intervention detailed in the DES Guidance 2008, GPs may wish to signpost patients to alcohol awareness groups. Leaflets will be available to patients, providing information about groups. Details of group locations and times will be circulated to GP practices and published on the Swanswell website at www.swanswell.org.

Referrals can be made directly to Swanswell
Email: alcoholawareness@swanswell.org
Tel: 0121 233 7400 or 07527 386 310

¹ National Alcohol Strategy – Department of Health 2007

² Cited in Alcohol & Brief Interventions Seminar Report
West Midlands Crime GRP Project April 2004