

Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment

SBIRT is an evidence-based, effective method to identify and assist individuals who misuse alcohol and/or drugs. This brief protocol has been implemented for use during routine medical and specialty care visits as well as in emergency departments and trauma centers to determine if a person's alcohol or drug use may be causing potential harm to his/her overall health. SBIRT provides an opportunity to help at-risk patients who are engaging in problematic behavior make changes before they become worse. SBIRT builds on the screening approach used in health care for a range of lifestyle issues (e.g. smoking cessation, blood pressure, weight loss and medication compliance). With SBIRT, screening for drug and alcohol use becomes part of every medical exam with simple tools that validate and make it easy to implement in a variety of healthcare settings.

SBIRT focuses on:

Screening for individuals at risk for substance abuse in primary care settings;
Identifying patients who do not perceive a need for treatment;
Provides a strategy to reduce or eliminate substance abuse; and
transitions patients into services.

Alcohol and drug use are both among the top 10 risk factors for disease. In addition, alcohol and drug use exacerbates a wide range of health conditions, including: liver disease, heart disease, certain cancers, accidents, gastrointestinal problems, oral health, and interferes with many medications. Several studies have demonstrated that SBIRT reduces the consumption of alcohol and other drugs and positively impacts the health of individuals, families and entire communities. The SBIRT model includes clinician-tested tools, protocols, materials and training to help healthcare providers help their patients.

How dental practitioners can help patients with substance abuse issues

Like physicians and other primary care health professionals, dentists and dental practitioners are in a unique position to help patients identify unhealthy use of alcohol and drugs and to address these issues before the patient begins engaging in abusive or dependent patterns of use. One of the reasons dentists are well positioned to talk to patients about their alcohol or drug use is the direct connection between substance use and oral health. Approximately 75% of esophageal cancers in the United States, and 50% of mouth, larynx and pharynx cancers, are associated with chronic heavy drinking. Sialosis, glossitis, and gingivitis can also be connected to heavy drinking. Cocaine use has been found to be associated with bruxism and gingival lesions, and heroin use with caries.

The relationship between substance abuse and oral health is perhaps epitomized, though, by the methamphetamine epidemic and "meth mouth" phenomenon. The importance of dental practitioners identifying patients who abuse substances and/or are substance dependent is underscored by the nation's increasing prescription drug abuse problem.

Particularly problematic is the abuse of opioid based medications, which many dentists prescribe for pain.

Additional Information:

<https://cabhp.asu.edu/content/sbirt>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3522753/>