

The RCGP Curriculum

The Curriculum Topic Guides

Super-Condensed Topic Guides 2021



Smoking, alcohol, and substance misuse

The Role of the GP and emerging issues in primary care

- Understand that harmful use of alcohol and other substances is often unrecognised and can take a range of forms
- Identify and offer interventions, including effective advice and treatment
- Recognise and manage medical consequences of smoking, alcohol and substance misuse
- Be aware of wider social issues, including the need to protect children and family members from the potential impact of smoking, alcohol or substance misuse, and respond to any safeguarding concerns
- Appreciate that helping people to stop smoking or overcome alcohol and substance misuse, whilst challenging at times, can be very rewarding for the doctor and life changing for the patient.
- Smokers and people with alcohol and substance misuse problems can often be stigmatised by society and health professionals and need to be treated with non-judgemental compassion
- As a GP you should be aware of the latest evidence and guidance on e-cigarettes, and smoking cessation more generally, and use your clinical judgement on an individual patient basis.
- Dependence on over-the-counter and prescribed medication is a growing problem. Misused 'prescription-only' drugs are increasingly being obtained through internet purchase as well as illegal street sales. Doctors are facing increasing complexity in managing long-term alcohol and substance misuse in the context of ageing patients with multiple co-morbidities.

Knowledge and Skills Self-Assessment Guide

Smoking

- Health effects of tobacco, as a risk or causative factor for a range of diseases and morbidity in people with established diseases and/or specific groups e.g. pregnant women, adolescents
- Risks of passive smoking
- Tobacco dependence and why people struggle to stop smoking
- Nicotine addiction (including risk factors) and withdrawal (including physical and psychological symptoms)
- Relationship between tobacco use and socio-economic status
- The concept of compensatory smoking, especially related to cutting down as a harm reduction technique
- Assessment of the individual, including relevant focused physical and mental health examinations and investigations
- Benefits of cessation in the prevention, treatment and improving morbidity of conditions
- Treatment of tobacco dependence and consultations in the GP practice such as brief interventions

Alcohol and substance misuse

- The natural history of the untreated condition including whether acute or chronic
- The prevalence and incidence across all ages and any changes over time and variations throughout life
- The impact on the mental health of individuals and their wider social network
- Risk factors, including lifestyle, socio-economic and cultural factors
- Diagnostic features and differential diagnosis
- Recognition of 'alarm' or 'red flag' features
- Appropriate and relevant investigations
- Management including self-care, initial, emergency and continuing care, chronic disease monitoring

Symptoms and Signs

Alcohol and substance misuse in primary care may present directly or indirectly, including through third party concerns for example, from a friend or family member, or school.

- Accidents and injuries occurring whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol and intoxication
- Behavioural changes such as neglecting other activities, poor hygiene, secrecy, self-neglect and social withdrawal
- Drug seeking behaviour
- Malnourishment

- Mental health problems related to substance misuse including mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psychosis
- Overdose
- Social consequences of substance misuse
- Signs and symptoms of medical conditions occurring in relation to alcohol misuse
- Signs and symptoms of medical conditions related to substance
- Symptoms of withdrawal

Common and Important Conditions

- Common effects of the main problem drugs
- Complications of alcohol and substance misuse in pregnancy. Antenatal care for women misusing substances and alcohol including involvement of social services and safeguarding of unborn children
- Crises occurring in relation to substance and alcohol misuse
- Medical complications of substance misuse
- Non-infective cardiac complications
- Venous thromboembolic disease.
- Medical complications of long term alcohol misuse, including: alcoholic liver and abdominal disease
- Common health conditions where alcohol use may be a contributing factor, including cancer and hypertension
- Neurological complications including encephalopathy, peripheral neuropathy and Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome
- Poly abuse of drugs and combined misuse of drugs and alcohol
- Mental health problems in the context of alcohol and substance misuse
- Tolerance, dependence and withdrawal

Examinations and Procedures

- Assessment of alcohol problem drinking to assess the nature and severity of misuse
- Assessment of social circumstances and functioning of alcohol and substance misusers
- Injection site assessment
- Mental health assessment
- Relevant physical examinations

Investigations

- Investigations including assessment of liver damage and blood borne viruses (Hepatitis B and C and HIV), full blood count, haematinics, liver function, renal function, thyroid function
- ECG monitoring of QT interval
- Evidence based screening tools to identify alcohol misuse for example, AUDIT-C
- Near patient testing for drug misuse

Additional important content

- Driving regulations (DVLA)
- Harm reduction in alcohol and substance misuse
- Impact of parental alcohol and drug misuse, including ability to function as a parent, safeguarding concerns, funding of drug habit, storage of drugs and paraphernalia
- Impact of parental smoking on children (for example, SIDS, asthma)
- Particular considerations regarding children and young people who smoke, misuse alcohol or drugs, including risk of grooming or abuse
- Preventing drug related deaths, including identifying patients at high risk, local knowledge relating to drug supplies, identifying and treating overdose and withdrawal (role of naloxone), patient education, safe substitute prescribing
- Relapse prevention strategies, including psychosocial and pharmacological methods, and management of continued smoking or alcohol and drug misuse amongst patients
- Substitute prescribing of methadone and buprenorphine – medical, legal, practical and safety aspects including shared care with addictions services

How this might be tested in MRCGP

AKT

- Natural history of viral hepatitis B and C infections
- Drug substitutes for drug and alcohol misuse
- Cardiac risks of cocaine use

RCA

- Bus driver asks for help to break his habit of heavy drinking

- Final year school student complains of irritability and low mood which is likely to be associated with his regular marijuana use
- Two A&E notifications: two falls while inebriated. The woman cares for her grandchildren but denies drinking when she is responsible for them.

WPBA

- Case discussion (CAT) about a woman who is concerned about her husband's alcohol intake and subsequent violent behaviour
- Consultation Observation Tool (COT) about a young woman who wishes to stop smoking
- Log entry about your understanding of the local drug and alcohol service following a patient's referral
- Clinical Examination and Procedural Skills (CEPS) relating to clinical examination of a patient with possible venous thrombosis from self-injection

How to learn this topic

This section describes *examples* of opportunities for learning.
We recognise that Covid-19 restrictions have significantly affected their accessibility

Other relevant specialties:

- A&E
- Mental Health and psychological support services
- Medicine: Respiratory, Gastroenterology, cardiology, neurology
- Public health



Acute

- Drug and alcohol withdrawal
- Physical and mental manifestations of drugs of abuse and dependence
- Overdose
- Social care
- Safeguarding children and adults

Primary Care

- Day to day practice
- OOH
- Community Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services
- Smoking cessation
- Community mental health clinics
- Community pharmacy – opiate substitution therapy

Core Themes

- **Communication and Consultation** – establish patient partnerships, challenging consultations, third-party consulting, person-centred consultations.
- **Prescribing** multi-professional management of dependent drugs, poly-pharmacy, smoking cessation, uncertainty and risk. Drug interactions with non-prescribed drugs.
- **Co-morbidity** - with physical and mental conditions
- **Teamworking** - across health and social care, drug and alcohol rehab and recovery services, smoking cessation.
- **Ethical and medico-legal** - capacity, consent, confidentiality, fitness to drive, safeguarding

Community/MDT

- Drug and alcohol rehab and recovery services
- Outreach services
- Smoking cessation clinics
- Community pharmacists
- Social care
- Police and forensic services

Tips

- Audit
- Significant Event Analysis
- Clinical governance
- Risk Assessment
- Dr as teacher
- Leadership
- BNF
- NICE guidelines