

## Children's alcohol use is also a safeguarding issue

I agree that GPs are well placed to take on increased responsibility for the safeguarding of children (1), and clearly early detection of maltreatment is a key role. I suggest that screening for alcohol use among younger adolescents could also help address these issues. While the main burden of chronic alcohol-related disease is in adults, its foundations often lie in adolescence (2). The proportion of 11-15 year olds (England) who reported that they have drunk alcohol decreased from 62% to 43% between 1988 and 2012, however the mean amount consumed almost doubled (from 6.4 to 12.5 units of alcohol per week) between 1994 and 2012. Alcohol consumption and related harm increase steeply from the ages of 12 to 20 years. In middle adolescence (ages 15-17) patterns of binge drinking emerge, and this is associated with increased physical and psychological morbidity (3). In early adolescence Alcohol Use Disorders are relatively uncommon, however alcohol has a disproportionately adverse effect on younger adolescents, predisposing them to damage the developing brain, to develop alcohol dependence in later life and increasing risk of disability.

GPs are already engaging with alcohol screening and brief interventions (SBI) among their adult patients; however current guidelines and the QOF do not adequately address the issue of alcohol consumption amongst those under 18 years old, and on younger adolescents in particular. A recent review of SBI for adolescents (4) commends that the use of the CRAFFT and AUDIT in health care settings to identify 'at risk' adolescents, and suggests that motivational interventions are effective at reducing levels of alcohol consumption and associated harms. We are currently exploring novel methods of SBI for this population presenting to Emergency Departments (5), and would hope that the findings from this programme of research will translate into the broader General Practice setting.

1. GPs are urged to take on greater role in safeguarding children (2014), *BMJ* ;349:g4494
2. Bellis MA, Phillips-Howard PA, Hughes K, Hughes S, Cook PA, Morleo M et al. Teenage drinking, alcohol availability and pricing: a cross-sectional study of risk and protective factors for alcohol-related harms in school children. *BMC Public Health* 2009; 9.
3. Statistics on Alcohol: England (2014). Health and Social Care Information Centre, London
4. Patton R, Deluca P, Phillips T, Kaner E, Newbury-Birch D & Drummond C. (2014) Alcohol screening & brief intervention for adolescents: The how, what and where of reducing alcohol consumption and related harm among young people. *Alcohol & Alcoholism* 49(2): 207-212 DOI: 10.1093/alcalc/agt165doi: 10.1093/alcalc/agt165
5. <http://www.sipsjunior.net/>

Main body 298 words

### Full Address:

Addictions Department  
Institute of Psychiatry  
King's College London  
Addictions Sciences Building  
4 Windsor Walk  
Denmark Hill  
London SE5 8BB