Alcohol IBA for adolescents

While agreeing that alcohol screening should be undertaken as a matter of routine among adolescents, it is important to note that hazardous and harmful levels of consumption are less common among those under 16 years of age. In England the proportion of young people aged 11-15 years who admit to having ever consumed alcohol fell from 62% to 45% from 1998 - 2011, while the average number of units consumed by those who do drink has almost doubled across the same time period, from 6.4 to 10.4 units per week (1).

Our recent review paper on alcohol identification and brief advice (IBA) for adolescents, recommends the use of AUDIT or CRAFT for the identification of those who may benefit from help or advice about their drinking, noting that motivational interventions based in health care or education settings are most effective at reducing consumption and related harms (2). Preliminary data from our survey of alcohol use among 10-17 year olds indicated a steep transition in drinking prevalence occurring at around 14 years; we are currently undertaking two linked trials of face 2 face vs. a Web based intervention for high and low risk drinkers aged 14-17 who present to Emergency Departments (3).

The 2012 survey of alcohol IBA in English EDs (4) noted that just 9% of departments routinely ask young people about their alcohol consumption, despite NICE (2007) recommendations that highlighted the need to identify alcohol use and provide appropriate interventions (5). Clearly there needs to be an increase in IBA activity to address the potential harm that even moderate levels of consumption can cause to young people.