

MICHAEL TAM (m.tam@unsw.edu.au)^{1,2}, LOUIS LEONG¹, NICHOLAS ZWAR¹, CHARLOTTE HESPE³

¹ School of Public Health and Community Medicine, UNSW Australia

² General Practice Unit, Fairfield Hospital, South Western Sydney LHD

³ University of Notre Dame Sydney, Australia

Abstract

Background

Patient beliefs and attitudes towards receiving alcohol enquiry from general practitioners (GPs) are unclear. These need to be understood to implement pragmatic early detection and brief intervention strategies.

Aims

We sought to answer three questions regarding patient acceptability of alcohol enquiry: (i) is it improved by asking within SNAP (smoking, nutrition, alcohol, physical activity)? (ii) how does it vary with the reason of encounter? and (iii) what is the explanation for these phenomena?

Methods

We used quantitative (survey experiment) and qualitative methods (grounded theory). Adult patients presenting to a GP clinic in a week in May 2014 were randomised to receive one of two postal questionnaires. The number of vignettes (20 presentation scenarios) where alcohol enquiry was rated as “acceptable” was the primary outcome measure. The intervention group rated the acceptability of SNAP enquiry, while the control group only rated alcohol enquiry. Survey respondents were recruited for semi-structured interviews.

Results

There were 144 survey respondents. Alcohol enquiry was rated as more acceptable (mean difference 2.1 vignettes, $p = 0.016$, Cohen’s $d = 0.40$) when presented in SNAP. There were large variations between scenarios – 46% versus 90% of participants rated GP alcohol enquiry as acceptable, in the back pain and diabetes vignettes respectively.

There were three factors that influenced patient acceptability of GP alcohol enquiry: (i) the perceived relevance of alcohol enquiry dialogue to the consultation, (ii) the approach and language of the alcohol enquiry, and (iii) unease about the moral dimension of alcohol consumption.

Conclusion

Patient acceptance of alcohol screening should not be assumed – contexts matter. Linking the reason for enquiry to patient agendas, screening for risky drinking within broader lifestyle factor assessment, collaborative consultation styles, and respecting patient sensitivities may improve acceptability. Alcohol enquiry in certain presentations was highly acceptable to patients and these may be screening opportunities.

YouTube video: <http://tiny.cc/hc14074-vid>



The thumbnail features a large yellow circle on the left containing the UNSW crest and the text: "How acceptable is it for GPs to ask about drinking? What patients think - a mixed methods study". To the right of the circle are four circular profile pictures of the authors: Michael Tam, Louis Leong, Nicholas Zwar, and Charlotte Hesper. Below the pictures are their names and contact information. At the bottom right is a QR code and the URL tiny.cc/hc14074. A small GP Unit logo is also present at the bottom left of the circle.

Publications



Literature review

Leong L, Tam CWM. Patient beliefs and attitudes towards the acceptability of receiving alcohol use enquiry from general practitioners: a literature review. *PeerJ PrePrints* 2:e439v1. DOI: 10.7287/peerj.preprints.439v1



tiny.cc/hc14074-litreview



Viewpoint article – conceptual overview

Tam CWM, Leong L, Zwar N. Let's listen to patient and GP perspectives in alcohol screening research. *Australian Family Physician* 2015; 44(6): 419-422.



tiny.cc/hc14074-viewpoint



Research article – the survey experiment

Tam CWM, Leong L, Zwar N, Hespe C. Consultation contexts and the acceptability of alcohol enquiry from general practitioners – a survey experiment. *Australian Family Physician* 2015; 44(7): 490-6.



tiny.cc/hc14074-quant



Research article – the semi-structured interviews

Tam CWM, Leong L, Zwar N, Hespe C. Alcohol enquiry by GPs – understanding patient perspectives: a qualitative study. *Australian Family Physician*. Forthcoming.



Contact Michael Tam for pre-print: m.tam@unsw.edu.au

Project information

Title **Patient acceptability and attitudes to receiving alcohol use enquiry from general practitioners**

Principle investigator Dr Michael Tam

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Ethics UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee – HC14074 (approved on 2 April 2014)



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General Practice Unit
Fairfield Hospital

+61 2 9616 8520

+61 2 9161 8400

<http://gpunit.org>

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