

FOLLOW-UP ALCOHOL COUNSELING IN A VA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Follow-up Alcohol Counseling in an Outpatient VA Healthcare System

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On my honor, I pledge that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this paper. April 20, 2023

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Abstract

Background: Alcohol misuse causes significant disability from lost work and injury and can lead to or worsen medical and mental illness. Among veterans, alcohol use is the most common substance use disorder and frequently comorbid with mental health problems. The U.S Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends brief intervention follow-up alcohol counseling (FAC) for adults who screen positive for alcohol misuse, as this is associated with decreased alcohol consumption. In the Veterans Affairs (VA) outpatient setting follow-up alcohol counseling is indicated by a positive screen and facilitated by a supporting clinical reminder in the patient electronic chart, which is used to track and measure rates of adherence.

Purpose: This project aimed to increase clinician knowledge regarding VA requirements for providing alcohol related counseling and to identify barriers to practice which may be contributing to consistent low rates in a particular VA healthcare system.

Methods: This project utilized a pre-post survey design. An on-demand virtual educational intervention was provided to a convenience sample of eligible clinicians across multiple outpatient clinics within a specific VA healthcare system regarding veterans' alcohol misuse, counseling guidelines per specific VA performance measure. Surveys elicited clinicians' self-reported knowledge and barriers to alcohol counseling.

Results: Findings were significant with regard to increased overall and specific knowledge of alcohol counseling requirements in the VA setting with most participants endorsing likely practice change. Reported barriers to practice included veterans' unwillingness, staffing issues, knowledge deficit, and time.

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Conclusions: This project increased clinician knowledge of VA requirements for the provision of follow-up alcohol counseling and facilitated a better understanding of some of the barriers affecting continued low rates.

Implications: Findings suggest there is a need for more training regarding alcohol counseling requirements in VA settings and process changes to address time constraints.

Keywords: VETERANS, BRIEF INTERVENTION, ALCOHOL COUNSELING, ALCOHOL MISUSE, VA

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