

Purpose of the study

- Excess alcohol use is common among HIV+ patients.
- Excess drinking quickens HIV disease progression, decreases medication adherence, and results in more risk behaviors.
- Despite the importance of identifying excess drinking in HIV+ patients, HIV care providers often fail to recognize their patients' unhealthy drinking, so alcohol screening questionnaires are important.
- Providers are not likely to use long alcohol screening questionnaires, so shorter ones are best.

How was the study conducted?

- Screenings were conducted at a hospital-based HIV/AIDS Center in New York City.
- 400 HIV+, ethnically diverse patients were screened over a 6-month period during their annual physical exams.
- Screening was done with the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), an alcohol screening questionnaire widely approved for screening unhealthy drinking.
- Screening results from the 10-question AUDIT were compared to results from the first 3 AUDIT questions (AUDIT-C) alone.

Description of the AUDIT-C screening tool

- The AUDIT-C, the first 3 questions in the longer AUDIT, asks questions about alcohol consumption
 - How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?
 - How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?
 - How often do you have six or more drinks on one occasion?
- The AUDIT-C was previously validated with general patient populations.
- An overview of its scoring can be found through the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare at <http://goo.gl/Z2zYS>.

Main findings of the study

- Screening results from the AUDIT-C were similar to those from the longer AUDIT.
- Nearly 1 in 4 HIV+ patients screened positive, indicating possibly unhealthy drinking behavior.
- Screening was acceptable, with no patients refusing to screen.

IMPLICATIONS

The AUDIT-C, a 3-item, simple alcohol-screening tool, can provide important information for HIV care providers in identifying patients with possibly unhealthy drinking behaviors. This can enable providers to support these patients in order to lessen the harms of alcohol use.

Strauss S, Rindskopf, DM (2009). Screening in busy hospital-based HIV care centers for hazardous and harmful drinking patterns: The identification of an optimal screening tool. *Journal of the International Association of Physicians in AIDS Care*, 8(6), 347-353.

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