

GEMs offer brief updates from general practice research tackling the challenges of front-line practice.

## Impact of the introduction and withdrawal of financial incentives on the delivery of alcohol screening and brief advice in English primary health care: an interrupted time series analysis

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### The clinical problem tackled by this research

Brief advice in primary care has been shown to reduce heavy drinking, alcohol-related problems, health-care utilization and mortality, but routine implementation remains low. Small financial incentives were introduced in England in 2008 to encourage primary care clinicians to identify newly registered patients drinking excessively (screening) and deliver brief advice to those in need of support; however the scheme was terminated in 2015. Our research used electronic patient health records to evaluate the impact of the introduction and withdrawal of financial incentives on alcohol screening and brief advice delivery in English primary care.

### What this research tells us about the problem

- The introduction of financial incentives for alcohol prevention work had limited success in improving rates of newly registered patients screened for higher-risk drinking in English primary care.
- However, their withdrawal in March 2015 saw an immediate and statistically significant drop in rates of both alcohol screening and the delivery of brief advice; a downward trend that has continued since.
- These findings highlight the potential adverse consequences of using short-term financial incentives to boost implementation of alcohol prevention in primary health care. Adding such practices to clinicians' contractual obligations following termination is an important first step to sustain delivery, but needs close monitoring thereafter.

### The research team (\*GPs)

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### Suggested WISE action

Consider a practice tutorial on alcohol-use disorders, discussing important opportunities to discuss alcohol consumption, such as in people presenting with dyspepsia or depression.

### Where you can read more about this work

O'Donnell A, Angus C, Hanratty B, Hamilton F, Petersen I & Kaner E (2019) Impact of the introduction and withdrawal of financial incentives on the delivery of alcohol screening and brief advice in English primary health care: an interrupted time series analysis. *Addiction*. Volume 115, Issue 1.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/add.14778>

Mahase E. GPs talked to fewer patients about alcohol after incentive scheme ended, study finds *BMJ* 2019; 367 :l5920  
<https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l5920>

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