

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE

The walk from the waiting room to the exam room is an opportunity for medical assistants to "walk and talk" with patients. Here is a script that shows how a medical assistant can provide education and support to patients about excessive alcohol use.

**Background:** Excessive alcohol consumption remains a leading cause of preventable illness and death in the U.S., with rising rates of harm, particularly among women and underserved populations. Stigma, cultural beliefs, and structural inequities influence drinking patterns and access to care. Medical assistants have an ethical responsibility to use non-judgmental, empathetic communication and culturally responsive care practices, particularly to marginalized groups, pregnant individuals, and residents in rural communities. Routine screening, brief interventions, and collaboration with the care team empower medical assistants in their day-to-day interactions with patients. Sharing this information with patients can encourage open conversations, foster patient trust, close treatment gaps, and support early intervention, ultimately contributing to reduced alcohol-related harm and improved health outcomes.

Remember, medical assistants can assist in preventing alcohol misuse by:

- incorporating routine, universal screening
- practicing nonjudgmental communication
- engaging in continuing education
- providing messages to motivate behavior change
- respecting patient autonomy
- collaborating with the care team
- advocating for a supportive environment
- reflecting and improving

**Medical Assistant:** \*calls patient from the waiting room\*

**Patient:** \*walks back to hallway\*

**Medical Assistant:** Hi, how have you been?

**Patient:** Not too bad.

**Medical Assistant:** Glad to hear it! We're sharing this card with all of our patients about how alcohol use can impact certain populations more than others. This card offers some statistics as well as resources in case you or someone you know may be part of one of these populations. If you have questions or are concerned about how alcohol is affecting your health, please talk with the doctor. There are also tips and resources on the back of the card. \*hands postcard with graphic to patient\*

**Patient:** Okay, thanks. Good to know.

**Medical Assistant:** No problem!

