

Alcohol relapse prevention after alcohol withdrawal in prisons of New South Wales, Australia: a retrospective clinical file audit

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Introduction and Aims: Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) has a higher prevalence in Australian prisons than in community. Most clinical interventions for AUD in prisons focus on withdrawal management. This study evaluates the extent of provision of evidence-based relapse prevention by clinical services in prisons in NSW for patients with alcohol dependence.

Design and Methods: Clinical data resources of 50 prison entrants who presented with alcohol withdrawal from August to November, 2018 were reviewed. Consecutive presentations were selected, with quotas to ensure representation by Aboriginality and gender. Data were extracted on demographics, comorbid substance use, current alcohol withdrawal management and alcohol relapse prevention intervention used or recommended.

Results: 38 males and 12 females (22 Aboriginal and 27 non-Aboriginal) met the inclusion criteria and were included. Two Aboriginal males had complex alcohol-related medical comorbidities, and 29 patients (58%) reported a history of other medical comorbidities; 60% self-reported a history of mental disorders. Over two thirds (n=35; 70%) reported other substance use. A minority of patients (n=9, 18%) had psychoeducation and 5 (10%) had motivational interviewing at the time of withdrawal; 17 (34%) had follow-up post-withdrawal planned. Just under half (n=23, 46%) had later contact by drug and alcohol clinicians in prison. Only 7 patients had a relapse prevention intervention leading up to their release from prison.

Discussions and Conclusions: Clinical alcohol relapse prevention interventions were infrequent among patients with AUD in NSW prisons. Systemic and staff cultural barriers should be explored to better implement alcohol relapse prevention.

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