Do occupational physicians have a consistent approach to alcohol cases?
Dr Mark Jacklin, 2011

ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of the study was to evaluate the knowledge and practice of occupational health physicians in their approach to cases of employees with alcohol misuse and to determine whether a physician’s qualifications or gender influence practice and knowledge.

Methods: The study comprised two elements. Firstly, a questionnaire was sent out to 200 occupational physicians who work for an independent occupational health provider in early 2011 to obtain a picture of current knowledge. Secondly, a case note review was conducted on all cases of alcohol misuse to assess current practice. The questionnaire and a pro-forma for the case note review were developed following a literature review of current evidence based guidelines for alcohol misuse. These looked at various aspects of alcohol misuse cases which are important in an occupational health setting. Statistical analysis was carried out using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) for Windows (Version 16.0.2).

Results: The questionnaire was completed by 50 respondents, with a response rate of 25%. The respondents had good knowledge on the majority of factors examined but knowledge of relevant guidelines was low in comparison. Statistical analysis showed a significant difference in 1 of the 11 aspects examined for qualification ($p < 0.05$) for physicians who use a screening tool. There were statistical differences ($p < 0.05$) with respect to Gender in 2 of the 11 areas (knowledge of evidence based guidelines); however only a small proportion of female physicians (n=12) completed the questionnaire in comparison to their male colleagues.

154 out of 200 cases were included in the case note review with the remainder not meeting the inclusion criteria. Overall, of the 8 aspects of practice being examined, the majority were carried out well with some topics being carried out less well. The area of practice that was covered least well was assessment of drug misuse (50%). Statistical analysis revealed no differences between physicians of differing qualifications or gender.

Conclusion: This study shows that the occupational physicians surveyed have a consistent approach to cases of alcohol misuse with majority of aspects covered well.
Although this research reveals that there are minor differences in underlying knowledge between groups of physicians, there are no differences when it comes to current practice. This study is comparable to other studies looking at one particular occupational health issue, though in this case it is over a variety of issues relating to alcohol misuse within an occupational health consultation.