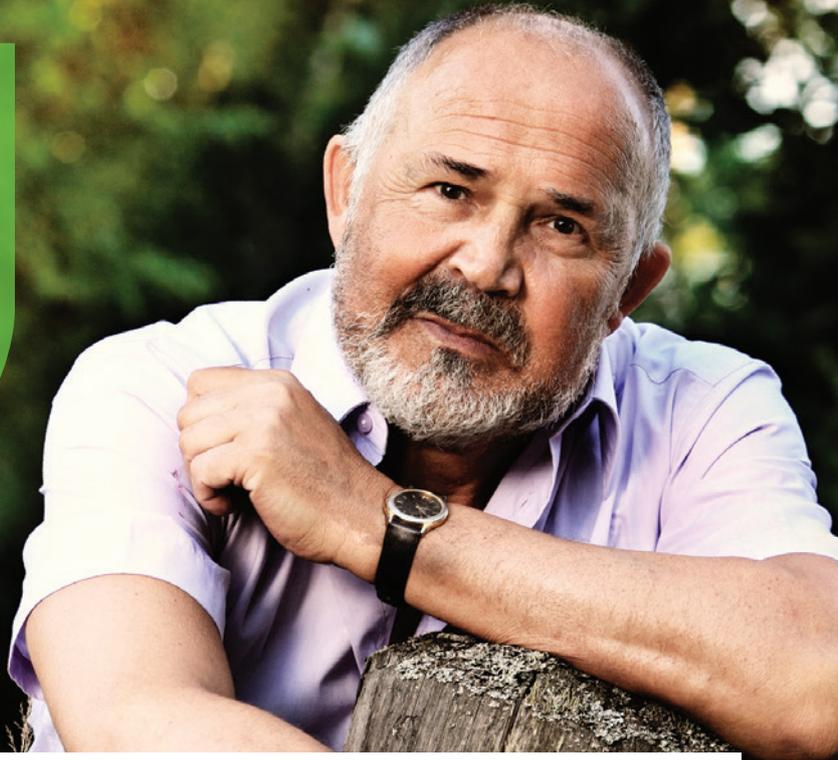




Identifying, Assessing and Treating Problem Gamblers.



Gambling can be a hidden cause of many of the symptoms and problems encountered regularly in general practice. Many problem gamblers are unaware that health problems such as headaches, anxiety, depression or poor sleep may be related to out of control gambling. Consequently, they are unlikely to seek help until their gambling has created a crisis.

Patients with gambling problems may present with the following symptoms and problems:

Anxiety and Depression

Approximately 75% of people with a gambling problem meet the diagnostic criteria for a major depressive disorder, with 40% expressing significant suicidal ideation.

Financial Problems

70% of people with a gambling problem reported having spent more than they could afford in the previous year. 11% sold property to gamble and 19% reported having borrowed money and not paid it back.

Family and Social Problems

One in ten gamblers say that their problem has led to violent incidents or relationship breakdowns.

Addictions

International studies show that amongst those with diagnosed gambling problems, 73% had an alcohol use disorder, 60% exhibited nicotine dependence and 38% had a drug use disorder.

For more information and resources visit
www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au/gps

Funded through the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund





Here is a simple tool that can assist in accurate diagnosis and help you to identify and treat a problem that's much more common than you may believe.

Identify

General practice is well placed to screen for problem gambling – but the process needs to be short and effective. Traditional problem gambling screening and assessment tools are lengthy and often complicated. To be effective, a tool needs to have a high psychometric performance in terms of high sensitivity and, more importantly, high specificity so that time is not wasted in referring inappropriate patients for assessment.

The Problem Gambling Research and Treatment Centre, a joint initiative of the University of Melbourne, Monash University and the Victorian Government, developed a single item screening tool perfect for a busy general practice.

When consulting with 'at risk' patients ask a simple screening question:

Have you ever had an issue with your gambling?

or

Has anyone in your family ever had an issue with gambling?

Assess

If the patient answers yes to the screening question, consider performing an assessment or referring the patient for a more thorough assessment by a Gambling Help Service. It may be helpful to explain to the patient the links between their presenting symptoms, stress and the gambling behaviour. Some simple advice about how to control their gambling may be helpful as well. Some brief motivational interviewing could assist the patient to acknowledge that they need to seek further help to reduce their gambling.

If the preference is to assess the patient within the practice setting a General Practitioner, Practice Nurse or Mental Health Clinician could administer one of several simple assessment tools, such as the Problem Gambling Severity Index (also known as the Canadian Problem Gambling Index). **Professional assessment resources are available at www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au/gps**

The patient could complete a self-assessment. **Patient assessment resources are available at www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au**

Treat

If the patient is assessed as having a problem with gambling, it is best practice to refer for treatment to a specialist practitioner in problem gambling. There is a developing body of research on treatment methods – with favoured major therapies including counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Graded Exposure Therapy and drug treatments.

Gambling Help Services are confidential, free and offer gambling, financial and relationship counselling and other therapies.

A list of all Gambling Help Services is available at www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au

Acknowledgement:

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Thomas, S. A., Piterman, L., & Jackson, A.C. (2008). Problem gambling: what general practitioners need to know and do about it? *Medical Journal of Australia* 189, 135-136.

Thomas, S.A., Jackson, A.C., Browning, C.J., & Piterman, L. (2009). A one item screening tool for problem gambling for use in primary care settings. *Problem Gambling Research and Treatment Centre, Melbourne University.*

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