How Can a Nurse Use Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention to Help Prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders?

Lauren Kim is a registered nurse at the clinic.

- 33 years old and a graduate student
- Having unprotected sex with her boyfriend
- Binge drinking on weekends to relax

Isabella Rodriguez is visiting a walk-in primary care clinic for help with chronic migraine headaches.

Administer the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (US) This standardized validated tool will help Lauren evaluate Isabella’s alcohol use.

Isabella scores in the range of risky drinking.

I want to give Isabella the tools to make healthy choices.

- She drinks alcohol frequently and she and her boyfriend have sex, but they are not using contraception.

Okay, I’m off to a good start—all screening for alcohol use should start with the AUDIT (US).

Now what would be the most effective way to continue?

- Ask permission, follow steps
  - Begins a respectful conversation about Isabella’s AUDIT answers.
  - Asks if she might consider reducing or stopping her drinking.
  - Elicits pros and cons
    - Uses open-ended questions and reflects Isabella’s statements.
  - Provide clear education
    - Explains the risk of an alcohol-exposed pregnancy— including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, preterm birth, and miscarriage.
  - Offers support and follow up
    - Suggests an effective birth control method.
    - There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink while you’re pregnant. That includes before you find out you’re pregnant.

- Offer support and follow up
  - Sets Isabella up with her migraine treatment plan (the primary reason for her visit) and with an appointment for a contraceptive.
  - Schedules a follow-up appointment to discuss her migraines and alcohol use.

- Refuse to provide other treatment
  - Requires Isabella’s cessation of alcohol use before addressing her other medical concerns.
  - Wears Isabella down until she claims she will stop drinking.
  - Considers the issue to be fully addressed and does not follow up.

- Lecture and pass judgment
  - Binge drinking will hurt your health. You should stop drinking.
  - Push the patient
    - Why should I help you with this anyway?
    - You have to change, now.

- Demand abstinence
  - Refuse to provide other treatment
    - Requires Isabella’s cessation of alcohol use before addressing her other medical concerns.
    - Wears Isabella down until she claims she will stop drinking.
    - Considers the issue to be fully addressed and does not follow up.

- Elicit pros and cons
  - Uses open-ended questions and reflects Isabella’s statements.

- Provide clear education
  - Explains the risk of an alcohol-exposed pregnancy— including fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, preterm birth, and miscarriage.

- Offer support and follow up
  - Sets Isabella up with her migraine treatment plan (the primary reason for her visit) and with an appointment for a contraceptive.

Isabella is considering how her alcohol use affects her. And she’s going home with the tools she needs to lead a healthier life.

Find out more about FASD and its prevention on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.

www.cdc.gov/fasd/