Identifying Alcoholism

Problem

Using drugs or alcohol in a repeated manner is considered substance abuse. Approximately 10% of the adult population is estimated to have a problem with substance abuse. These patients live completely normal lives, have normal relationships, hold full time employment, and perceive that they do not have a problem with alcohol or drug use.

However, it is important for the nurse, particularly when these patients are admitted for medical reasons, to formally assess their use of alcohol, if upon initial screening, a problem has been identified.

Consequence

Not identifying an alcohol abuse problem could result in incorrect diagnosis of related medical issues and inappropriate treatment plans. Patients identified at risk can receive appropriate detoxification and intervention to reduce / prevent withdrawal symptoms.

Solution

The CAGE assessment tool has been a useful and validated tool for the identification of a client with an alcohol abuse problem. The four questions to ask are:

- Have you ever felt that you should Cut down on your drinking?
- Have people Annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink or Eye opener first thing in the morning?
- A positive response to any of these questions indicates that the patient needs additional assessment.

References

*Avoiding Common Nursing Errors*, Lisa Marcucci, MD, Editor, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2010