

An evaluation of the NHS Health Checks and Wind Down initiative: ChaMPs Public Health Network Alcohol Social Marketing Alcohol project

Topline findings from the pilot study: The Travellers Rest

Background

- The initiative took place in the Travellers Rest for six weeks (9th November – 18th December 2009).
- The main aim of the evaluation was to explore pub users' views on the acceptability of the intervention and of its specific components (health checks, Wind Down, creatives, prize draw, email communications) and messages.
- Views were explored using a structured questionnaire comprising a series of open and closed questions. For some questions a 5-point likert-type scale was used to gauge opinion. Some socio-demographic information was also collected, as well as a small amount of information on outcomes.
- Fieldwork carried out:
 - interviews with two *healthworks* members of staff who delivered the health checks;
 - interview with the Travellers Rest landlady;
 - two visits to the pub on the nights the health checks were taking place (approximately 4.00pm – 9.00pm) to recruit research participants to the evaluation – both those who were in the target group and those who were outside;
 - observations of the initiative.

Key findings

(i) *Who did we speak to?*

- A total of 21 people participated in the evaluation, of whom 17 (81%) were male and 4 (19%) were female. Of the 17 men, 11 (65%) were in the target group (35-55 years old) and of these, 5 (45%) were single and 6 were married/living with a partner. Ten (91%) men in the target group described themselves as 'regulars' at the Travellers Rest.

(ii) *Summary of information from health checks*

- Findings from the health checks indicated that 7 out of the 10 men were smokers; 7 had a BMI in the overweight/obese category; and, 5 were at increased risk of cardiovascular disease (on the basis of their waist circumference).

(ii) Acceptability of the intervention

- Overall, there was a high degree of acceptance that a pub was an appropriate setting to base a health initiative. This particularly applied to the availability of a free health check in a private room, supported by empathic advice. Men in particular were perceived to benefit from this as they were thought to be less likely to go to their GP for a health check.
- Some people thought that the initiative could be integrated into any pub, whilst others thought that it would depend on the type of pub, its size, how busy it was and so on. A critical factor was seen to be the landlady and the extent to which she facilitated the initiative in terms of speaking and encouraging people to participate.
- Overall, the health initiative messages were thought to be acceptable, appropriate and clear; they were seen to connect with people. Some people commented that they thought the messages could be stronger.
- Those who had health checks were positive about them both in terms of being able to access them in the pub as well as the actual health check process and interaction with staff; the tutors were described as professional, helpful and pleasant. Some people indicated that they would be taking action as a consequence (for example, going to smoking cessation, eating breakfast).
- The posters and other creatives that were used to advertise the health initiative and its component parts (Wind Down, health checks) were perceived positively and generally thought to be eye-catching.
- Mixed views were most evident in relation to the Wind Down. Some thought the idea was good in theory but not in practice; some pointed out that they could eat toast and drink water at home. Others said they would eat free toast and drink water at the end of the evening.
- Some did not have access to the internet and didn't think email was a good way of communicating with people: text and post were thought to be better.
- A number of other settings were identified as potential places where men (in particular) could access health checks: stadia; bus and train stations; airports; the workplace; supermarkets, for example.

(iii) Engagement in the intervention

- Numbers signing up for health checks: 10 men between the ages of 35-55 signed up for a health check out of a possible 28 appointments (36%). Some people outside the target group expressed an interest in having a health check. For a few people, comments were made that they came to the pub *because* the health checks were available.
- Qualitative comments on the extent to which people engaged with the intervention
 - There was evidence to indicate that the creatives had been effective in making people aware of the initiative and of its specific messages about 'drinking a little less'.
 - Conversations were generated about the intervention in general and the health checks in particular.

→ The Wind Down – providing subsidised shandy – was not taken up by pub users and was changed to free water. Some of the qualitative comments from people suggested that although the Wind Down was a good idea in theory, in practice it was unlikely to work as people tended to drink more at that time of night.

(iv) People's views on the extent to which the culture of the pub had changed

- There were mixed views on the extent to which the culture of the pub had changed. It was evident that the introduction of the initiative meant that there was a new topic of conversation amongst pub staff and pub users (for example, encouragement to undertake a health check and associated 'banter' and people's results from their health checks).
- Generally, the initiative was seen as having been embedded well into the pub – eye-catching but not overly intrusive.

(v) People's views on the changes to behaviour associated with the intervention

- Some people commented that the initiative had raised their awareness or reminded them about their drinking and the impact it might be having on their health.
- Other people commented that they were already aware of the harms of drinking but found it difficult to change.
- Some other people reported that they were already trying to reduce their drinking.
- Some people commented that the initiative would make them change an aspect of their lifestyle: for example, get active, cut down on drinking, and eat more healthily.
- Some people also said that they thought their health had improved – for example, they felt better in the mornings – but it was difficult to attribute this directly to the intervention.
- The view was expressed that people were different and this determined whether or not they engaged with the initiative.

Conclusion

- Overall the intervention was rolled out well in the Travellers Rest.
- The roll out was supported and facilitated by the landlady, who was positive about the intervention.
- The health initiative was, overall, well-received by pub users.
- Possible changes to the intervention to consider before it is rolled out further are: whether or not to carry on with the Wind Down; if the Wind Down is continued, how it might be incentivised; extending the availability of the health checks beyond the current target group;
- Increasing the number and size of posters and reviewing their location (toilet cubicle, for example).
- The extent to which the intervention is likely to lead to a change in behaviour in relation to drinking and other aspects of lifestyle is difficult to determine.

Awareness about the potential harms of drinking was quite evident amongst pub users. People expressed a view that what was difficult was actually changing their patterns of drinking, particularly because the pub was a social setting that was valued. The main catalyst for change might be the health check where there was a fairly intensive one-to-one interaction that gave specific, personalised advice in a supportive setting, as well as signposting to other services. Increasing the number of health checks available, as well as providing encouragement to people – particularly those in the target group – to take up the opportunity might be the most effective strategy for maximising success.

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