

More ER Doctors Screening for Alcohol

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News Summary

A growing number of emergency-room doctors are screening patients for alcohol use, focusing especially on people involved in car crashes, the New York Times reported Oct. 27.

For the screening, emergency personnel ask patients about their drinking behavior. Doctors then have a conversation with patients who said they had consumed alcohol prior to their emergency-room visit.

A growing number of health experts are using the emergency-room visit as a "teachable moment" to identify people with alcohol problems and direct them to resources where they can receive the help they need.

"It's a prime opportunity to reach people at risk," said Dr. Gail D'Onofrio, an emergency-room physician at Yale-New Haven Hospital in Connecticut. "Many of the people are young adults, and they don't use primary care, and they don't have insurance."

Research indicates that nearly a quarter of the people who come to an emergency room with some kind of trauma are intoxicated.

"I can make the case that a two-minute screen for alcohol-use disorder can help doctors discover other medical problems patients may be at risk for," said Dr. Jeffrey Runge, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and a former emergency-room doctor. "Not to mention the risk of motor-vehicle injuries, the risk of spousal abuse, for falls, for other types of injuries."