

- *Learning from Tragedies*
- Alcohol and Adult Safeguarding

# Background: the Blue Light Project

At any one time the majority of problem drinkers are not engaged in services, and of those who do engage approximately 50% will quickly drop out.

The Blue Light project aims to help professionals:

- To work more effectively with change resistant drinkers.



Alcohol Concern  
Promoting health; improving lives

Alcohol Concern's Blue Light Project

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# Working with change resistant drinkers

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The Project Manual

Mike Ward and Mark Holmes

# Awards

Winner of

- Guardian Public Service Award
- Royal Society of Public Health award
- Nursing Times award

Finalist for

- Municipal Journal award
- *Also mentioned as good practice in the Carol SAR*

# Real people in the real world

- The *Blue Light* project highlights the potential for positive action

# Case Study - Mr D

- 54 year old man
- Fire setter
- Confused but deemed to have capacity
- Possible frontal lobe damage
- Wheel chair bound
- Multiple health problems inc COPD

# Case Study - Mr D

- **In 3 months:**
- 28 ED attendances
- 124 Calls to EMAS
- 8 inpatient admissions (15 days)
- Arrested 8 times for shoplifting
- Cost health services £138,000 in 12 months (inc £13,000 EMAS/ £12,000 Fire).  
This does not include Police costs

# Mr D highlights five issues

- The challenge of assessment and diagnosis;
- The complicating factor of alcohol related brain injury;
- The challenge of “choice”
- The challenge of the legal framework; &
- **The evidence of effective intervention.**





# Learning from tragedies

An analysis of alcohol-related  
Safeguarding Adult Reviews  
published in 2017

June 2019

Nothing about alcohol harm  
is inevitable. By working  
together, we can better  
protect those most in need.

ALCOHOL  
CHANGE<sup>UK</sup>

ALCOHOL  
CHANGE<sup>UK</sup>

# Analysis of SARs published in 2017

- 41 reviews were found in total, 15 of which mention alcohol.
- In 11 alcohol is relevant to the main incident.
- In every case, the serious incident was the death of the adult being safeguarded.
- **But this is not a statistical analysis**

“Carol”



TOHO

CHANGE<sup>UK</sup>

# “Alcoholic Angie”

- *In 3 years, over 1000 recorded direct contacts with mental health and alcohol services, ambulance, hospital.*
- *472 reported incidents to the police.*

# Key features

Multiple complex needs in addition to alcohol misuse:

- mental health problems,
- chronic physical health conditions,
- neurological conditions
- self-neglect,
- exploitation by others,
- unfit living conditions, past trauma.

In almost all cases, support services failed to cope with that complexity.

# Key features

- Men who had become unemployed, lived alone and lost contact with their families. The cause of death in these cases was self-neglect and refusal of care from services.

# The complex impact of alcohol

The perfect storm of physical conditions

- Depression
- Is there evidence of alcohol related brain injury
- Physical health problems e.g. fatigue due to liver disease
- Confusional states e.g. liver disease, pancreatitis and urinary tract infections
- Sleep disorders
- Nutrition
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome
- ...and they are dependent.



# The bottom line...

- Chronic alcohol misuse is an important issue in adult safeguarding and self-neglect.
- Too little guidance on applying the Care Act or the equally relevant Mental Capacity Act, to this group of people.
- This is true of other serious case reviews e.g. DHRs

# The bottom line...

- Do Mr D and Carol have mental capacity to make choices about their care, treatment and living conditions?

# Key themes of our research

- Attitudes, knowledge and skills
- The legislation and its application
- What happens next? What does good look like...?
- Improving Safeguarding and SARs

# Attitudes, knowledge and skills

- Workers identified people as choosing their lifestyle.
- Workers under-estimated the extent of the drinking.

# Recommendations

- Rec 3 - All professionals working with alcohol-dependent adults should be trained to recognise the complicated role that alcohol plays in adult safeguarding, that 'free choice' is often an unhelpful paradigm, and to avoid stigmatising drinkers.

# Recommendations

- Rec 7 - National guidance should be developed on how to assess alcohol-related risk, including how to address potential under-reporting of alcohol use.

# The legislation and its application

# Carol

- *Among professionals the understanding of mental capacity and how to assess it is not robust, which impacts upon professionals responding effectively to cases which are complex, limiting the risk assessment and professional response.*



# Carol

- *An individual who is deemed to have full mental capacity may make unwise ...choices but they are entitled to do so. However, the concept of “executive capacity” is relevant where the individual has addictive or compulsive behaviours. This highlights the importance of considering the individual’s ability to put a decision into effect (executive capacity) in addition to their ability to make a decision (decisional capacity). Therefore, for an individual such as Carol the assessment of mental capacity is unlikely to be as straightforward as a simple yes or no. (3.6.10)*

# Mr B Redbridge SAR 2018

- ...adults have the right to make their own decisions about how they live their lives, so long as they have the mental capacity to do so, however unwise those decisions appear to professionals or others. However ... there is a line above which the consequences of those decisions, for the individual and / or for others, are so severe or so detrimental to health and wellbeing, that, even though the individual has capacity to make them, the self-neglect involved should be regarded as an adult safeguarding issue within the terms of the Care Act.

# AB SAR 2018

- In Adult AB's case the strong focus on determining eligibility seemed an unhelpful starting point for securing AB's engagement. (6.17)

# Recommendations

- Rec 8 - The Mental Capacity Act 2005 Code of Practice should be amended to include specific guidance for working with individuals with alcohol misuse or dependence, especially when they are likely to have complex needs.
- Rec 9 - National guidance should be produced on applying the Mental Capacity Act (2005) to people with fluctuating capacity due to alcohol misuse.
- Rec 10 - National guidance should be developed on applying safeguarding thresholds to people who self neglect due to alcohol misuse.

- Useful legislative framework

- Drug and Alcohol Treatment Act 2007 which came in to force in September 2012.
- Unfortunately this only applies in New South Wales

- The New South Wales, Australian experience of involuntary treatment. Here is Glenys Dore talking to their experience

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA\\_3uo\\_u6nyQ&index=2&list=PLSEhy70YpU5tZya\\_oHxz5UTuOUyJokMdFD](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA_3uo_u6nyQ&index=2&list=PLSEhy70YpU5tZya_oHxz5UTuOUyJokMdFD)

# Criteria under 2007 Act

- Severe dependence (tolerance, withdrawals, loss of capacity to make a decision); AND
- At risk of serious harm (e.g. physical or psychological, bleeding varices, end stage liver failure, bilirubin >500, children or other dependents in their care); AND
- Likely to benefit from treatment but refuses; AND
- No less restrictive treatment available.



# Typical client

- 59 year old man
- Calling emergency services when intoxicated, crying, physical pain, threatening suicide
- 114 ED presentations (56 in past 6 months)
- Severe alcohol problem
- Living in squalor
- *“Heart sink” patient*

# Evidence of effectiveness - Australia

Of 40 detained alcohol patients:

- 10% died
- 25% relapsed
- 60% were abstinent (18) or had improved
- 5% not known.

- **What works?**
- **What does good look like?**

- 3.4.24 The Carol report highlights the *Blue Light* project as a model of best practice with this client group.

# Outreach works

Outreach is the best evidenced intervention

- Wigan, Notts, Salford, Lincs, Surrey
- ACTAD - £1 spent on assertive outreach can save £3.42

# Jack Barnsley SAR 2018

- *An identified worker should be enabled to develop a relationship with people in situations of severe and complex self-neglect. This will involve tenacity and persistence...(7.1)*
- *Management sign-up is needed to support practitioners in long-term work with complex cases.(7.1)*

# Multi-agency groups

- Multi-agency groups
- e.g. Medway, Sandwell, Northumbria, Worcester, Lincs

We need a team around the person

- *Share information*
- *Joint planning*
- *Professional challenge*

# Recommendations

- Rec 2 - Local authorities should ensure that vulnerable adults with alcohol problems are actively supported to engage with services and should support services to adapt so that they can better serve these adults. In particular, there should be support for multi-agency systems that can coordinate assertive outreach and view the task of generating positive engagements as an important action in its own right.



# The problem of alcohol services

- Rec 5 - The commissioning of alcohol services should be carried out in a way that minimises levels of staff turnover and recognises the importance of continuity in supporting people with complex needs.
- Rec 6 - Significantly greater investment is needed in alcohol treatment services, with much of that investment funding service models like 'assertive outreach' which support the most at-risk and vulnerable individuals.

- Improving safeguarding and SARs

# Training

- We offer Blue Light training and train the trainer training

# SARs

- Rec 1...the SAR team should always have access to independent expertise in alcohol misuse in order to properly assess the role of alcohol in the incident, and to ensure that lessons are effectively learned.
- We will offer independent expertise on alcohol misuse to support SAR processes

# National initiative

- We are putting together a national initiative to develop the response to vulnerable and self-neglecting adults with alcohol problems.

- An initial analysis of SARs published in 2018 is available by emailing me on the address below.

# Resources

- You can see Alcohol Change UK's report [Learning from tragedies: an analysis of alcohol-related Safeguarding Adult Reviews published in 2017](#) by clicking on this link.
- The Blue Light manual is available free of charge on the ACUK website.

- [mike.ward@alcoholchange.org.uk](mailto:mike.ward@alcoholchange.org.uk)
- [www.alcoholchange.org.uk](http://www.alcoholchange.org.uk)