

Lessons and Learnings – July 2023

The following is a summary of lessons and learnings developed by the Clinical Excellence Commission, Patient Safety Directorate from Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Serious Incident Reviews. Consumer details have been changed.

Alcohol or stimulant is a red flag for increased risk and need for further assessment

Alcohol or stimulant use can lead to an elevated level of suicide risk through disinhibition and impulsivity. Alcohol or stimulant use should be a red flag for increased risk and the need for further assessment.

Background

A male was receiving care from the Acute Care Team (ACT) following a referral from the Mental Health Line. His friend made the referral, concerned for the consumer's welfare.

Shortly after the referral, the consumer's partner contacted the ACT concerned that the consumer was behaving erratically and displaying symptoms of intoxication from alcohol and prescribed medications. The consumer's partner had not previously seen him in this state.

The ACT was unsuccessful in attempts to contact the consumer by phone. The ACT requested a Police Welfare Check and planned a home visit. The consumer was found deceased before the Welfare Check and home visit were conducted.

Discussion

Alcohol or stimulant use should be a red flag for increased risk and need further assessment. Alcohol or stimulant use is known to heighten the level of suicide risk due to disinhibition and impulsivity.

Alcohol or stimulant use should be a red flag indicator of high -risk and the need for assessment outside standard mental health risk assessments.

We value your feedback. If you have any questions or comments about this report, please email:

CEC-PatientSafety@health.nsw.gov.au

Minimum standards for physical health screening

There are minimum standards for physical health screening. The NSW Health Physical Health Care for People Living with Mental Health Issues Guideline (GL2021_006) details the role of NSW Health services to meet the physical health needs of people with mental health problems.

Background

A female with history of schizoaffective disorder and physical comorbidities including diabetes and obesity presented to the Emergency Department with an exacerbation of her mental illness symptoms. She had multiple previous admissions to mental health inpatient units over the previous decade and had experienced significant difficulties in managing in the community. She was being treated with antipsychotic medicines, and oral hypoglycaemic medicines for her diabetes.

In the Emergency Department routine blood tests were conducted, and she was assessed as not having any acute physical health concerns. It was determined her physical comorbidities could be managed on the unit. She was admitted to a mental health sub-acute rehabilitation unit with the aim of locating supported independent living accommodation. On admission to the unit, she underwent dietetic review. There was however no further dietetic review or monitoring of her physical health until several months into her admission. Furthermore, it was noted that she frequently snored while sleeping, however no further investigations were conducted.

Her admission to the sub-acute unit extended to over an 8-month period. One morning she was found unresponsive and was unable to be resuscitated.

Discussion

While there was no acute deterioration indicating urgent blood tests or further assessment were required, the consumer had several risk factors signifying the need for ongoing monitoring of her physical health, including routine blood tests and cardiometabolic screening. The NSW Health Physical Health Care for People Living with Mental Health Issues Guideline (GL2021_006) details the role of NSW Health services to meet the physical health needs of people with mental health issues.

The Guideline outlines minimum standards for physical health screening including cardiometabolic screening requirements. The Guideline also includes a requirement for sleep investigation for consumers on antipsychotic therapy and/or a body mass index of greater than 25kg/m².

Resources

NSW Health Physical Health Care for People Living with Mental Health Issues Guideline ([GL2021_006](#))