

PARTY: Key Messages for General Practice Staff

PREVENTION

The main health problems that will affect young people now, and into their adulthood, are preventable. These problems are related to sexual health, mental health, substance use, accidents and injury.

ACCESS &

Many young people are unaware of how to recognise and express their health problems in order to get the help they need, when they need it.

Young people report significant barriers to accessing health care. Concerns include: confidentiality of health information; cost of services and treatments; convenience of access and fear of judgment. This can lead to delays in seeking help and can result in young people presenting to health services in a state of crisis.

Despite these barriers, around 80% of young people will still visit a GP at least once per year, usually for physical health complaints. This visit provides an important opportunity for young people to develop positive experiences with accessing health services and relationships with health service providers.

RRISK-TAKING IN

Risk-taking and defining boundaries is a normal and necessary part of development in adolescence. However, adolescent risk-taking that poses dangers to life and health need to be assessed.

Risk-taking behaviour also tends to cluster in individuals. For example, a regular smoker in adolescence is also:

- 2 times more likely to diet severely
- 3 times more likely to have psychiatric morbidity
- 7 times more likely to be a heavy alcohol drinker
- 9 times more likely to have unprotected sexual intercourse
- 19 times more likely to use marijuana weekly

(ref: Victorian Adolescent Health Cohort Survey, Centre for Adolescent Health, 1996)

There is a mismatch between the major health problems of young people and the reasons they visit general practice, possibly because of barriers to health care access and developmental stage. The major causes of death in young people (14-24yrs) are traffic accidents and suicide and most other ill-health is caused by mental health problems, injuries, unprotected sexual activity, substance abuse and other risk-taking behaviours. Yet, young people visit GPs mainly for physical reasons like respiratory and skin problems.

There is an imperative for health professionals to pro-actively screen all young people for risky behaviours to ensure opportunity for detection and early intervention.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people (14-24yrs) require support to navigate the immense physical, intellectual and psychosocial changes they are experiencing when: transitioning to adult roles, relationships and responsibilities; exploring self-identity and experimenting with boundaries.

GPs, practice nurses and practice support staff all play a vital role in supporting young peoples' access to care, as well as in carrying out important health-risk screening and preventable health care interventions.

The PARTY Project offers general practices an opportunity, and support, to enhance their approach to young peoples' health.

For more information contact: Dr Lena Sancic/ Brenda Grabsch on 83447196 or email:

l.sanci@unimelb.edu.au or b.grabsch@unimelb.edu.au or FAX 9347 6136

Investigators: L. Sancic, K. Hegarty, P. Chondros Department of General Practice, University of Melbourne; G. Patton, S. Sawyer Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital, J. Pirkis School of Population Health, University of Melbourne; E. Patterson School of Nursing, Griffith University; A. Shiell Dept community health, University of Calgary.