

**Discussing Positive Alcohol Screenings:
A Moderately Resistant Patient *Role Play***

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We'd like to welcome you to this enhanced bite-sized learning. This enhanced BSL will expand on key performance elements related to discussing positive alcohol screenings with primary care patients. It builds on an earlier enhanced BSL titled "Discussing Positive Alcohol Screenings, Case 1, Verbal Screening, a Minimizing Patient". The case presented today will be similar, but we'll present a case with a bit more severity in alcohol-related problems and a bit more resistance.

Let's begin. Three key elements were discussed in the previous BSL. They consisted of providing a segue to the discussion; provide elicitation strategy; and using tools to help with education. This current BSL will add the following elements.

Number one, rolling with resistance. Some individuals might be resistant to questions related to alcohol use, and they may be even more resistant to any hint or suggestion that they're drinking too much or having alcohol-related problems. A common principle to keep in mind is rolling with resistance. This refers to the principle of not directly confronting a patient, making accusations or taking on too strong of an expert role. Instead, you adopt a non-judgmental approach that accepts the individual's perspective and deflects the resistance.

Element number two, decisional balance for drinking. One common strategy promoted to help foster engagement in individuals in discussions around their drinking is to review the pros and cons around alcohol use. This is sometimes called the decisional balance exercise. Today, we'll show a brief exercise around this. In the rest of the presentation, we show a scenario that reflects a common workflow in primary care. It starts with a simple frontline verbal screener, progresses to a bit more probing around problem use, rolls with resistance, and uses a decisional balance exercise. We're going to begin role play now.

Doctor

Okay, Miss Hall. I did have a few more questions I ask all my patients. I usually ask about alcohol use because it can affect people's health. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

Patient

I don't mind at all. I can tell you now. I don't have any health problems that's related to drinking alcohol.

Doctor

Okay, that's great. I guess that's a good place to start then. You say you haven't noticed any health problems because of drinking?

Patient

That's correct. My labs came back, and my liver is fine.

Doctor

You're right. I see here in your chart that your liver function tests are normal, so that's really good. I usually talk with people before they develop problems like liver trouble, so they can avoid getting sick altogether. Let's start with your drinking patterns. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you had four or more drinks in a day?

Patient

Let's see. You know, I'm not really sure.

Doctor

Yeah, it could be sometimes hard to nail that number down. Sometimes, I'll put it a little bit differently. Would you say you had four or more drinks in a day at least once in the past 12 months?

Patient

Four or more. I think I have, but who doesn't from time to time?

Doctor

Okay, sure, that's a pretty common thing, I think. Maybe why don't you tell me a bit more about how many drinks you have in a usual week?

Patient

You know I really don't count them.

Doctor

Okay. How about this? Can you tell me how many days you drink in a given week?

Patient

I drink a glass or two of red wine every night while I'm cooking dinner. I heard that red wine is good for your heart.

Doctor

Okay, yeah, I've heard that too. A glass or two of wine every night for health purposes. Do you sometimes drink more than that?

Patient

Occasionally, but mostly around the holidays or when we have family or friends over for dinner, but it's not like I get drunk or anything.

Doctor

Okay. That's good. You might drink a little bit more than usually during family dinners or for holidays, but you try to avoid getting drunk. I think that's a really good practice. Have you ever personally felt like you should cut back on your drinking?

Patient

Personally, I haven't felt that, but my children nag me from time to time about it.

Doctor

Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about what they're concerned about?

Patient

Well I think they're just a little overprotective. They see I get a little tipsy at times, and I slur my words, and I appear to be a little shaky on my feet. They think I might fall and hurt myself, but I don't think that will happen. I do Zumba four times a week. That keeps me strong and steady. I'm stronger than they are, I bet you.

Doctor

Yeah, that might be true. That's great. Zumba can be a really good exercise, and it sounds like you really take your health seriously, that you don't feel like you drink too much, but maybe some of your family might be concerned about you sometimes. I can tell just from talking with you that you get some pleasure out of drinking. There's something about drinking that gives you pleasure. Can you tell me little bit more about some of the good things you like about drinking?

Patient

Sure. It relaxes me. Like they say on the internet, it's good for my heart.

Doctor

Okay. It relaxes you, and you feel like it helps to keep you healthy. What else do you like about it?

Patient

I like the taste of wine. I've become quite the connoisseur. You know it's just not the same when you eat a nice meal and not have wine with it. And I must admit, I'm a little shy around people, so it makes me more sociable and fun to be around.

Doctor

Yeah. I think those are some pretty common things that people like about drinking. So, you like the feeling you get. It relaxes you. You like the taste. It makes you more sociable. But from what you were saying earlier, there might be some not so good things, too. Like your children nagging you. Can you tell me any other concerns that you might have about your drinking?

Patient

No, I don't have any other concerns.

Doctor

Okay. How about when you drink more than you usually do? Most people who are regular drinkers will sometimes say they drink a little bit more than they usually do or a little bit more than they expected. Does that have an effect on you, like giving you headaches next morning or make you feel sluggish?

Patient

Well, if I drink too much I sometimes have a headache the next morning, but coffee, breakfast, and a Bloody Mary usually cures that.

Doctor

All right. So, that Bloody Mary kind of helps sometimes. I know people who do that, but what else? So, sometimes after you have a rough morning, are you concerned about what your children say? Are you concerned about the fact that you might fall when you're drinking?

Patient

Well, maybe a little. I didn't tell them, but I did fall a few months ago, but it wasn't due to drinking. I tripped over the rug in the kitchen.

Doctor

Okay. All right. So, what about other things like driving? Do you ever drive after you've been drinking?

Patient

No, I don't drink and drive.

Doctor

All right, well, that's good. That's an important thing to avoid if you're drinking, is to not drive or do other things that you shouldn't be doing that might require you to really pay attention and to be sober. So, yeah, I appreciate. I know that sometimes these questions are kind of difficult to talk about and I've asked you a bunch of them, so I really appreciate you taking the time to answer the questions and talk with me about it. So, I'm gonna kind of sum this up and ask you another question.

You listed some things that you like about drinking, like the taste and how it makes you feel. And you have some things that are not so good, like your family nagging you and the occasional hangover. So, do you find that the pros or the good things about drinking outweigh the cons or the bad things?

Patient

I do, yes.

Doctor

Okay. So, I have another question for you now about that. For you, what would it take for the cons to outweigh the pros? What would be your tipping point that would make you think, "Maybe I need to reconsider how much I'm drinking"?

Patient

You know, I haven't thought about that. I guess if I start having health problems. If it starts to impact my liver or if I'm having problems with my balance or my memory, that would definitely be that tipping point for me.

Doctor

Yeah. I see the pattern. You're concerned about your health, it's important to you, and you don't want to cross that line. So, it sounds like you already know about the possibility of liver problems if a person's drinking too much, but just in case, I wanted to review a few other problems that you might not be aware of. Many people don't know.

So, for example, regular alcohol use increases your risk of certain cancers and regular heavier use can lead to heart disease. A lot of people don't know about that. And although you might not really want to hear this, because I know that your family has nagged you about it, but alcohol can definitely make people more prone to accidents, like falls. Have you heard about these other risks? Have you ever thought about them before?

Patient

No, I hadn't.

Doctor

All right. Well, I have some good news for you. I have some suggestions on how you can avoid developing these problems. Most people don't realize it, but doctors have studied alcohol use carefully and have come up with some drinking guidelines. If you drink below these guidelines, you're much less likely to develop problems related to alcohol use in the future. The recommendation for a woman your age is to try not to drink more than three drinks in a given day and no more than seven drinks in a week. What do you think about that? Does that sound reasonable?

Patient

Well, kind of. It sounds kind of low to me. I know a lot of people who drink more than that. I'm a lightweight compared to them.

Doctor

All right. Well, it's a good thing that you're not drinking too much and that you don't really drink as much as some of the folks that you do, so I think you're trying to keep within a range that you find comfortable, which I think is important. But I tell you what, do you think you could just try it out and see what happens, not drinking more than three drinks in a day or no more than seven drinks in a week? What do you think?

Patient

I can try, but I can't make any promises.

Doctor

Sure. That's fine. I don't want you to have to make a promise. I just want you to try your best and we'll see what happens. Here, I have some additional information for you, too. You can take this home and review it. Because you're so concerned about your health, I think you should take a few minutes and look at it, because it provides some more information about the guidelines and about some of the known health risks that happen whenever people drink above those guidelines.

All right. We're gonna close the role play here. So, just in summary, let's highlight the key points of what we just discussed. The patient was moderately resistant to engaging in a discussion around alcohol and tried to close down the conversation early. But the clinician rolled with the patient's resistance and continued the conversation moving anyway.

He identified areas that were of implied importance to the patient, even though the patient didn't explicitly state such as her concern over her health and the fact that she doesn't drink as much as many people she knows. We tried to convert those into strengths and as a starting point for the reason she should pay attention to how much she drinks.

Finally, the clinician introduced a process where he made the pros and cons of her drinking more clearly defined and used it as a segue to engaging in change talk. Having the patient identify more clearly what cons would have to occur before she considered the balance swinging towards the more moderate drinking can operate as an anchor for future discussions. So when the patient comes back in, he can review those guidelines and talk about the pros and cons in that follow-up session.

This concludes our enhanced bite-sized learning. We'll have additional bite-sized learnings to address how to use more structured screening approaches later.