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A Qualitative Interview Study of Concurrent Alcohol and Medication Use among Older Adults in the UK.

Older people’s alcohol consumption is increasing and they are the age group likeliest to drink alcohol frequently. However they are more susceptible to the negative health impacts of alcohol due to, among other factors, their greater use of prescribed medicines. This study, based in the North East of England, assessed the views of people aged over 50 in relation to concurrent alcohol and prescribed medication use. Qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of older people (12 male, 12 female, ages 51-90) who consumed alcohol or had been dependent revealed that when faced with the dilemma of combined alcohol and prescribed medication use participants fell into two distinct camps. Participants either reported reducing or stopping alcohol consumption altogether due to the risks associated with the combination or carried on drinking problematically as they were too addicted to stop or were unaware of the hazards. Alcohol was also used instead of medication in a number of cases either to numb the feeling of pain or to cope with mental health issues such as depression. Medication was also prescribed to manage alcohol dependence or to deal with health problems, either physical or mental, caused by excessive alcohol use. It is important that older people understand the dangers of combining alcohol with prescribed medication. Health professionals have an important role to play in educating older patients about the consequences of concurrent alcohol and medication use however they should also be aware that older people may be using alcohol to self-medicate.

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After attending this session participants will be able to understand older people’s views regarding concurrent alcohol and medication use.

After attending this session participants will be able to tailor advice to older people in relation to concurrent alcohol and medication use.

Behavioral and Social Sciences

Health promotion.