

HEALTH PROFESSIONALS NEED TO BE GAMBLE AWARE

GambleAware's network of local services and online counselling could help reduce waiting lists for mental health services. The charity offers a range of effective psychosocial services across Great Britain and provides support for those with mental health problems.

Gambling is considered a popular pastime in Britain, with most gamblers treating the activity as a fun leisure pursuit. However, for some, gambling can become a serious problem which affects every aspect of daily life. The Institute for Public Policy Research estimated the cost to government of problem gambling could be as high as £1.2 billion, with much of that cost falling on mental health services.

Up to 600,000 adults in Great Britain are estimated to be at risk of problem gambling, with 250,000 considered to be problem gamblers. Gambling can have a negative impact on family and friends, not just the individual. It's often the loved ones of those with gambling problems who experience mental health difficulties, due to the added pressure a gambling addiction can have on relationships and home life.

Gambling is considered to be a 'hidden addiction'. GPs and other health professionals often miss the signs of a gambling problem as they may be concealed by other issues. When people seek help, conditions such as depression or anxiety can often hide the underlying cause of the problem.

Problem gamblers frequently experience a range of comorbid mental and physical health difficulties. These can range from mood disorders to more pervasive psychiatric conditions, such as personality disorders or attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. It is thought that around three-quarters of problem gamblers may have an alcohol problem and as many as half may struggle with drug abuse. In addition to this, problem gamblers may also be at particular risk of suicide.

GambleAware is calling for health professionals to consider the role gambling addictions may play in relation to the health of their patients. This is evident particularly for those suffering stress and ill health related to debt. Understanding the



relationship between gambling and these other issues will help health professionals better equip themselves to have a conversation about gambling, and to know where to refer people for specialist help and support.

Dr. Jane Rigby, the charity's director of commissioning, says: "There's a simple, validated two-item test which any frontline professional can rely upon. The test gives a strong indication of whether a person may be dealing with a gambling problem or not:

- 1) "Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gambled?"
- 2) "Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?"

Answering yes to either question is a strong sign the person would benefit from further intervention and a referral to the free treatment services we offer nationally."

A range of psychosocial interventions are available via GamCare, which operates a national network of charities with over 15 years' experience of working with individuals and their families to address problems relating to gambling. For more complex cases, referrals can be made to the National Problem Gambling Clinic, which is

part of Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust, or to residential services operated by the Gordon Moody Association. Links to these services can be found via the GambleAware website: BeGambleAware.org.

GambleAware also provides advice for professionals in dealing effectively with a problem gambler in a crisis. There is a range of information and guidance available via the same website to help professionals in delivering brief intervention. GambleAware also funds the National Gambling Helpline 0808 8020 133, which is available from 8am to midnight, seven days a week. The line is there to support problem gamblers, those affected by someone else's gambling and for health professionals to seek immediate advice, support and if needed, referral to specialist services.

Dr. Rigby concludes: "Our services are only seeing a fraction of those who could benefit from psychosocial interventions designed to address problem gambling. And we need GPs and other health professionals to identify and refer more people to us, freeing up stretched NHS resources for other needs. We need to make sure health professionals are equipped to deal effectively with problem gambling as a comorbid issue in more complex cases."

NATIONAL GAMBLING HELPLINE

0808 8020 133

8am-midnight, 7 days a week

IT'S NEVER TOO SOON TO BeGambleAware®