



# AWARENESS OF HEALTH RISKS FOR PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITY

## Background

People with learning disability have greater health needs than the general population but these are often unrecognised and unmet. They are less likely to be offered health screening and health promotion is poorly developed. The move to community living has increased risks such as poor diet and smoking, particularly for those with least support. Despite this, very little is known of people's own perceptions of their needs.



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*"This work has started to unravel key elements within health risk for people with learning disability. These need to be addressed by primary care. A collaborative approach between practice staff, care workers and people with learning disability themselves is most likely to have a positive impact on health."*

## Aims and methods

The study explored levels of awareness of lifestyle related health risks for people with learning disability. It was based on interviews with 20 people with a mild learning disability, 10 carers and 10 care workers. The interviews were based around vignettes or case studies which highlighted various health issues. These were used to stimulate discussion and explore the views of participants.

## Key findings

- A range of health risks was identified with some differences across the three groups.
- Poor diet and smoking were seen by all participants as the most serious concerns.
- Three quarters of people with learning disabilities had concerns about excessive alcohol consumption, whereas most carers and care workers viewed moderate drinking as acceptable.
- Carers and care workers considered social isolation as a problem; this concern was not specified by people with learning disability – although a quarter highlighted health benefits associated with social interaction.
- Enabling individuals to have informed choice in how they lead their lives was seen as important by all participants.

## Conclusion:

- The research clearly demonstrates the ability of participants to grasp the complexity of health risks.
- It demonstrates the feasibility of engaging with people with mild learning disability regarding health improvement.
- It is, however, a small study and its findings cannot be generalised.
- Links need to be strengthened between the primary care

team and people with learning disability, their carers and care workers.

- This should be based on
  - genuine engagement that seeks to identify what people with learning disability want;
  - empowering people with learning disability to make choices that are right for them;
  - developing education and support for carers and care workers.



**Further information: full report available on [www.ascr.ac.uk](http://www.ascr.ac.uk)**

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Reference: 'Family Practice Advance Access', 15.11.07, Oxford University Press