

FOR SHORT ANSWERS

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FOR LONG ANSWERS

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ON EXAMINATION QUIZ

Alcohol abuse

The answers to these questions, and more questions on this topic, are available from www.onexamination.com/endgames until midnight on Wednesday.

This week's quizzes are on alcohol abuse and are taken from the OnExamination revision questions for the MRCP (Ireland) Part 2 written exam and the MRCP Part 1 exam.

Question 1

A 40 year old man with chronic alcohol abuse presented in the emergency department with confusion, agitation, and ataxia. He had been found wandering the streets at 2 am and was brought in by the police. He had been admitted on numerous previous occasions for symptoms related to alcohol abuse.

On examination he appeared dishevelled and confused, and he smelt of alcohol. He was disoriented in time and place, and his score on the mini-mental state examination was 16 out of 30. He was afebrile with a blood pressure of 138/90 mm Hg. He had bilateral 6th nerve palsy, gaze evoked nystagmus, and gait ataxia.

What treatment should this patient receive?

- A Diazepam
- B Immunoglobulins
- C Penicillin
- D Steroids
- E Thiamine

Question 2

Which of the following statements regarding disulfiram are correct?

- A Disulfiram acts by promoting the metabolism of acetaldehyde
- B Disulfiram can be used in patients with a history of psychosis to limit alcohol excess
- C Disulfiram can be used to assist abstinence from alcohol in patients with heart disease
- D Patients using alcohol based perfumes may develop serious reactions
- E Disulfiram requires regular dose titration once initiated

CASE REPORT

A series of unfortunate events

A 24 year old man presented to the accident and emergency department because he had been planning to take an overdose, but had decided instead to seek help from mental health services. He had intended to take the contents of several blister packs of paracetamol, together with alcohol. He had been having suicidal thoughts for a week but they had become particularly pronounced over the past two days.

His recent history was one of a "series of unfortunate events" that had left him feeling desperate. Four months ago his flatmate stole money from him, which meant that he was unable to repay several loans. His creditors had started to threaten him and he had been forced to move to a different city and leave his job. He had become socially isolated, and continuing financial difficulties had resulted in poor relations with his new landlord. Just before his presentation he had been awaiting a cheque for housing benefit. However, this had not arrived, and he described this as "the last straw." He reported feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of "what's the point?"

He had no history of suicide attempts, self harm, or suicidal thoughts. Five years previously, however, he was admitted twice to a psychiatric ward with psychotic symptoms associated with the use of cannabis. There was currently no evidence of psychosis, and no relevant medical history. He came to hospital on his own, but a friend provided a collateral history on the telephone. The patient said that if he went home he was worried that he would take the large amount of paracetamol tablets that awaited him there.

- 1 How would you assess the patient's risk of suicide?
- 2 How would you manage this patient?
- 3 What are the general principles of suicide prevention?

Submitted by Stephen Ginn

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STATISTICAL QUESTION

Cohort studies

Researchers investigated whether increased body mass index was a risk factor for prostate cancer. Data from a prospective cohort study known as the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study were used. In this study, 51 529 American health professionals aged between 40 and 75 years responded to a postal questionnaire. The health professionals were recruited in 1986 and self reported that they were free of prostate cancer at the start of the study. Participants were then followed up at regular intervals until 1994.

Which of the following statements, if any, are true?

- a) The health professionals were studied retrospectively
- b) The cohort was prone to the healthy entrant effect
- c) The health professionals were selected on the basis of their BMI
- d) The natural epidemiology of prostate cancer could be studied in this cohort

Submitted by Philip Sedgwick

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