

# Alcohol, Capacity and Vulnerability

**Sarah Cake**, Integrated Safeguarding Lead,  
Dorset County Hospital

**Jo Findlay**, LD and MCA Advisor, Dorset  
County Hospital

**Cathy Franks**, Liaison Psychiatry Manager,  
DHUFT for DCH

**Debbie Cobb**, Addictions Specialist Nurse,  
Dorset County Hospital





## Aims of the session

- Understand a little more of the physiological impact of alcohol misuse and dependence and how this may impact upon a person's ability to make choices/ decisions around care and treatment
- Provide an opportunity to reflect upon how you as Professionals may interpret and implement the MCA (2005) in relation to people with alcohol misuse or dependence
- Provide an opportunity to explore some of the complexities in peoples lives living with alcohol misuse or dependence
- Provide and opportunity to reflect on how these complexities pose challenges to professionals in trying to support individuals living with alcohol misuse or dependence- particularly in Acute Hospital settings



# Context



In 2017, 5507 deaths in England were directly attributable to alcohol, an increase of 11% since 2006.

Hospital admissions caused primarily by alcohol were 17% higher over the same period.

DCH attendances/ admission for 2018/19 where alcohol is a causal factor **1336**.....

Age Group On Admission	Inpatient Admissions
18 - 64	1,069
65 - 76	196
77 - 85	63
86+	8



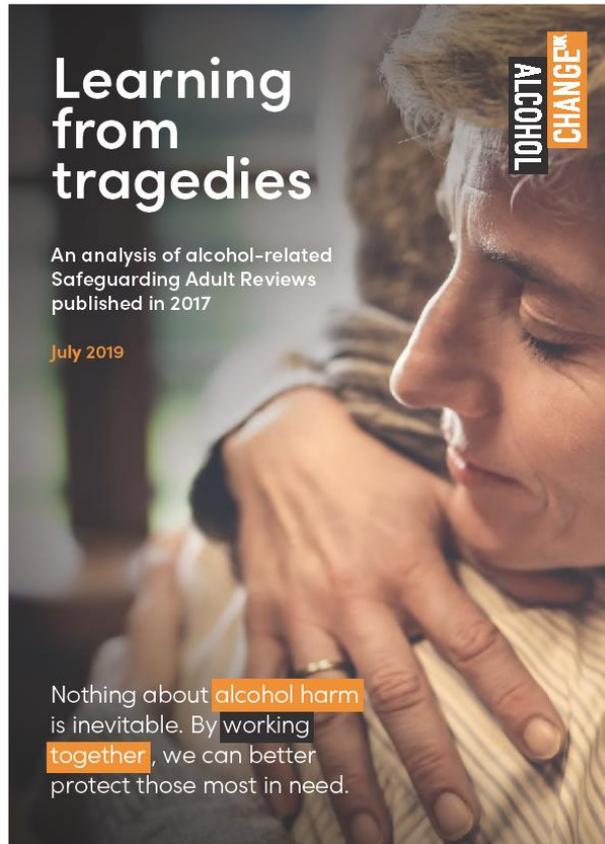
## Research Objectives

- To better understand the role that alcohol plays in situations where vulnerable adults die and draw out any lessons that could be learned
- The authors carried out an in-depth analysis of 11 Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) published in England in 2017, in which alcohol was identified as a significant factor in the person's life/death





## Summary



Most of the adults featured had complex needs in addition to alcohol misuse, including mental health problems, chronic physical conditions, neurological conditions caused by alcohol, self-neglect, exploitation by others, living in unfit conditions, and experiences of past traumatic event such as bereavement and physical or sexual abuse.

In almost all cases, support services failed to cope with that complexity.

2 main stories emerged

- 6/11 vulnerable adults were being exploited or abused. Cause of death in 3 cases was murder or injury from physical abuse
- 4/11 cause of death related to self neglect and refusal of care from services



## Recommendations



The report gave 10 recommendations, many are around LAs giving active support to engage with services and also the commissioning of alcohol support services

Those which stand out for the purposes of today's discussion are:

- National guidance on how to assess alcohol related risk
- MCA (2005) Code of Practice should include specific guidance on working with individuals with alcohol misuse
- National guidance on applying the MCA (2005) to people with fluctuating capacity
- National guidance in applying safeguarding thresholds to people who self neglect due to alcohol misuse



## Setting the scene

Mr. A is a man in his 60's who is alcohol dependent and has presented at DCH on 2 occasions

He lives with mum who has early onset dementia  
They are effectively codependent

Admitted to ED then moved to ITU and later a ward. Post ITU he presented as Psychotic- Was this due to alcohol withdrawal or a ICU psychosis syndrome  
He did improve and his psychotic beliefs lessened although remained to some degree

Discharged home- started drinking again and then stopped. This caused alcohol withdrawal symptoms and he was re admitted to DCH again with confusion and psychotic symptoms

**Question** whether he understood the damage his alcohol dependency was having on him.....even if lacked capacity no way of imposing treatment.....



## Some questions...

- Are we reluctant to consider the question of mental capacity if a finding of incapacity would make no practical difference, because treatment could never be imposed?- They don't fit MHA
- Does the intense desire or compulsion to drink impact upon the person's ability to use and weigh information?
- Currently in Acute Trusts we are able to use DoLs for people who present as having an impairment or disturbance in functioning of mind or brain as part of alcohol withdrawal/intoxication to enable us to deprive their liberty for the purposes of care and treatment
- When LPS arrives, presence of 'Mental Disorder' will need to be evidenced - how will we get this?



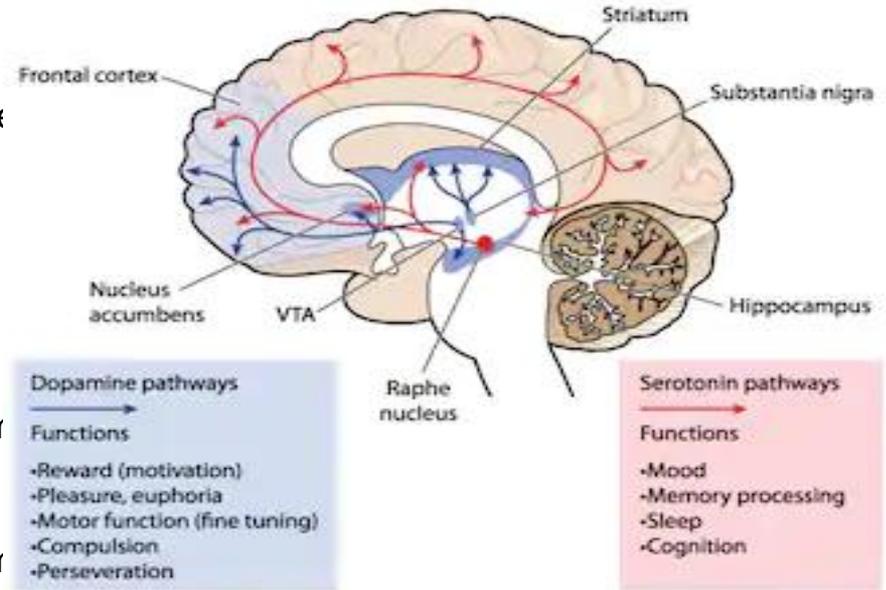
## Why does alcohol affect your capacity

**Dopamine** helps to regulate emotions and enhance pleasure

**Serotonin** acts as a mood stabilizer and helps to regulate healthy sleep

**GABA** (*gamma-aminobutyric acid*): suppresses functions of the central nervous system

**Glutamate** (*gamma-aminobutyric acid*): suppresses functions of the central nervous system and reduces the stress response



shutterstock.com • 329843900

- Alcohol increases the levels of dopamine, serotonin, and GABA in the brain while inhibiting the normal transmission of glutamate. High levels of dopamine and serotonin serve to make individuals feel happy, less inhibited, and more social. When high levels of GABA are present, relaxation results.
- Alcohol interferes with brain chemistry, which in turn can affect brain circuitry and structure. The alcohol consumption can damage the hippocampus, which is involved in memory functions and learning abilities; the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for decision-making skills and problem-solving abilities; and the cerebellum that works with coordination, emotional regulation, and movement capability



# People who misuse alcohol are complex

## Exploitation- historic or current

- Domestic or child abuse
- Cuckooing
- Financial, physical, sexual abuse

## Traumatic events

- Bereavement
- Loss of employment
- Relationship breakdown
- Estrangement from family, isolation

## Health issues

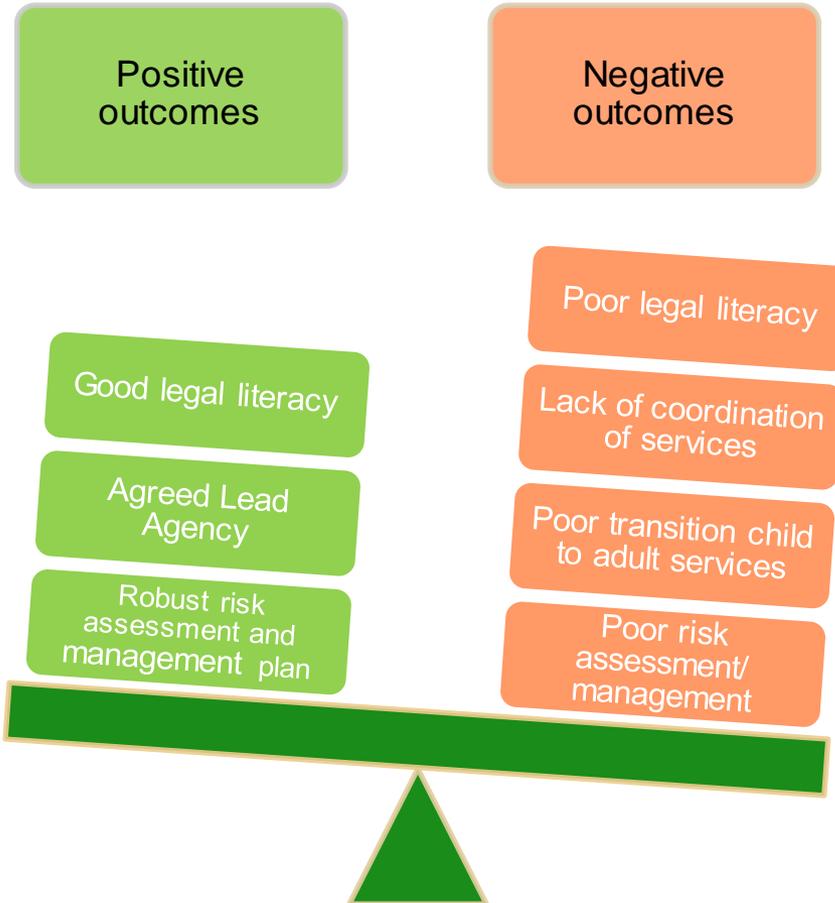
- Mental Health problems
- Chronic physical health issues

## Other

- Self neglect
- Non - engagement with services- Social Care, Primary Care, Utilities



# Balancing the risk





# Acknowledgements and references

- **Learning from Tragedies: An analysis of alcohol related Safeguarding Adult Reviews published in 2017.** Alcohol for Change UK. July 2019. London
- **Problems of control: Alcohol dependence, anorexia nervosa, and the flexible interpretation of Mental Incapacity Tests.** Craigie and Davies. 2018. Oxford University Press