

A sobering reflection!

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Research undertaken by the University of Queensland (UQ) and University of Otago (UO) found 14% of over 4400 nurses in the study engaged in harmful daily drinking. This places nursing in the top 10 of professions that abuse alcohol (Nursing Review, March 2012).

It's data like this that supported an argument to establish the NMHP in 2006. I am pleased to report that since then we have been able to assist hundreds of our Victorian colleagues to address their substance use concerns.

Alcohol continues to be the primary drug of concern for the nurses, midwives and students which present to the NMHP for help. For many reading this, it might be hard to know just where to start in understanding whether 'my alcohol (or drug) use is a problem'. Here are some questions which might help with this reflection;

- If you drink, how much? Would it be considered a 'safe' level of consumption?
- When do you drink? Can you see patterns, habits or dependence forming?
- How do you feel before you drink? Anxious, happy, stressed, irritable?
- Are you pre-occupied with the thought of alcohol or drinking? Do you count down the hours or minutes until you can have that first drink?
- How do you feel when you drink? Relaxed, relieved, depressed, self conscious?
- How do you feel after drinking? Unwell, impaired, satisfied, guilty?
- Do you rely on alcohol to function? In social settings? Professional settings?
- Has your drinking changed? Drinking more days a week? Drinking more each session?
- If so, do you know why? Has something changed in your life? An event or incident? Something positive or negative?
- Is your drinking getting in the way of other things in your life? Relationships, work, achieving your goals?
- Do you ever lie about the amount you drink? If so, why?
- Do you like the person you are when you drink? Would you like to be in your company when you drink?

For more information go to; <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your health/alcohol guidelines>

If you are concerned about your alcohol intake it's important to know you're not alone! There are services and supports such as; GP and alcohol and drug services available to you for help and support, and contacting us at the NMHP can be a 'safe way of entering the service sector' if you are concerned about your privacy or confidentiality.

Our experience at the NMHP would support the findings of the study undertaken by UQ and UO. In fact research indicates that nurses are most likely to underestimate their substance use through fear of being labeled and stigmatized.

We know early intervention gets the best outcomes for people with substance use concerns and we understand the barriers which exist for nurses with these sensitive health issues. Our service was formed on the basis of making access to us as easy and comfortable as possible.

For more information on the NMHP go to www.nmhp.org.au. For advice and guidance on matters related to nurse and midwife health call the office on 03 9415 7551.