Helping people who are intoxicated.

Intoxication, mainly with alcohol is not uncommon. It can lead to acute alcohol poisoning which is a life threatening emergency. Alcohol is a toxin which effects the Central Nervous System. Depending on how much alcohol is absorbed different regions of the Central Nervous System are affected.

The outer regions of the brain, the cerebrum, are the centres for higher thinking As you move deeper into the core of the brain to structures like the cerebellum and the brain stem you reach more primitive areas of the brain which are responsible for basic life functions like breathing and involuntary muscle control. What this means is that anything which affects the central nervous system is first seen impacting the higher brain functions. Any change on the AVPU scale (see below) means that the brain is being affected. A continued decline on the AVPU scale means that deeper and deeper levels of the brain are being affected.

A Alert Alert and oriented to time, place

V Voice Responds to verbal stimuli . The person will respond verbally to questions but will not initiate speech

P Responds to pain stimuli Rubbing the sternum with your knuckles or pinching the earlobe results in wincing, pulling away, or other nonverbal responses

U Unresponsive Unconscious

Alcohol is a Central Nervous System Depressant

The way alcohol impacts on the brain depends on how much alcohol has been absorbed into the bloodstream. It differs from person to person but the effects begin to show at the higher centres…the cerebrum and then effect the cerebellum and the inner centre of the brain.

Blood Alcohol Level

What happens as each part of the brain is affected:

Cerebrum: Functions like recognition, vision, reasoning, and emotion are affected. Inhibitions are lowered judgement is affected. As alcohol levels increase, vision, movement, and speech are impaired.

Blood alcohol level (.01% to.30%)

Cerebellum: Coordinates movement & balance. Problems develop with coordinating and balance Blood alcohol level (.15 to.35%)

Medulla: Controls basic survival functions such as breathing and heartbeat. The brain's ability to control respiration and heart rate is severely diminished. Heart rate can drop and breathing cease, causing death.

Blood alcohol (as low as .30%)

This means that as more alcohol enters the bloodstream vital body functions will be depressed.

The "-Umbles"

Stumble, mumble, grumble, fumble - all common signs that the highest level functions of the Central Nervous System have been affected. These are common signs of CNS effects due to alcohol. The person's gross motor coordination has been impaired leading to falling and stumbling. The individual may become belligerent and even violent. The person may be incoherent. While people typically laugh at such "drunken behaviour" it is in fact a clear indication that higher brain function is impaired. This is someone who has begun to slide down the AVPU scale. If more alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream what is viewed as "silly drunken behaviour" can have tragic consequences. The most important thing to realize as a first aider is that the impact of alcohol on the brain can be deadly.

Like any first aid situation, you must carefully monitor the person. The most reliable sign of a serious problem is a decrease in AVPU. This means that just "letting the person sleep it off" could have disastrous consequences. If the person is asleep you have no way of knowing if AVPU is declining. It is possible for someone who is in acute alcohol poisoning to go into respiratory arrest while they are asleep. If you see a decline in AVPU to the V level you have a potentially serious situation on your hands. If someone passes out it means they are U on the AVPU scale.

One common scenario is vomiting. For a person who is at the top of the AVPU scale and is fully alert this probably presents little risk. However, for the person who is sliding down the AVPU scale, vomiting carries a serious risk of aspirating the vomit and obstructing the airway. Many times people who are intoxicated are left passed out on a bed by themselves. They vomit (body purging toxin) and then in their unconscious state aspirate on the vomit and stop breathing. If left alone death can occur.

Make the right treatment choice early. Better to be cautious and safe (and even have to deal with a disgruntled student in the morning) than end up asking yourself why you didn't act and someone died. Make sure person is in the recovery position, then get further help. Check <https://111.nhs.uk>

This site will answer questions and advise whether to seek further medical help.

As AVPU continues to decline and deeper levels of the brain become affected the more insidious aspects of alcohol poisoning become evident. Too much alcohol can affect the respiratory drive and the person may stop breathing. Always get help

Response Plan

Follow Flow Chart – attached