

# Grant supports community drug screenings

SBIRT program addresses full spectrum of users

BY BY [ROBERT ALLEN](#)

SUMMIT DAILY NEWS

SUMMIT COUNTY, CO COLORADO,

FRISCO — A Summit County clinic is one of eight in the state targeted for a portion of a \$14 million federal program that prompts medical staff to ask patients about drug, tobacco and alcohol use in hopes of changing their behavior.

The five-year program, conducted through the Summit County Community Care Clinic, is intended to treat substance abuse as a health-care — rather than legal — issue.

Dr. Karen Wyatt, who works at the Summit clinic, said the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment program lets the patients know it's OK to ask about substance abuse.

"They know we're open to it. We're not judgmental," Wyatt said.

This year, the Summit clinic has received about \$61,000 to administer the program and employs a health educator for at least \$38,625, according to the program budget.

Mark A.R. Kleinman, a professor and director of the Drug Policy Analysis program at the University of California-Los Angeles, said the costs are relatively low when considering the "mental, physical health and all the rest of the behavior we might have to pay for through the crime-control system."

"I've been studying (drug use) for 30 years, and I don't remember when everybody in the field didn't mourn that we weren't doing that," he said. "There's no doubt that most routine medical care misses substance-abuse disorders... This is easily the best way to spend the marginal two minutes of the annual physical."

Wyatt said the program, which has been in use at the clinic since December 2007, has proven successful.

After undergoing a screening and brief intervention, patients who habitually consume more than five drinks dropped 38 percent statewide, according to program statistics.

The program includes services ranging from basic information about the effects of substance abuse to brief intervention counseling or referral for treatment.

"I feel it's been very helpful to us ... The more we know about the patient, the more we can help," Wyatt said.

For example, a diabetic man was having trouble controlling his blood sugar, she said. The screening revealed that he was drinking six beers each night after work, which was discovered to have created the imbalance.

SBIRT Colorado program director Brie Reimann said the program aims to make the substance screenings as common in clinics as blood-pressure screenings.

Since the grant was awarded by the federal government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in September 2006, the program has reached more than 17,500 Coloradans.

Of this year's \$2.8 million allotment, the budget also includes about \$295,000 for marketing and public-relations expenses.

In Colorado, some 35 percent of the patients screened through the program were deemed to be at a moderate risk for developing serious problems and received brief intervention, meaning "motivational interview techniques" were used to make them aware of the risks of substance abuse.

About 2 percent of Coloradans screened are referred to intensive or specialized treatment.

Reimann said in Summit County, about 21 percent receive brief intervention, and about 2.6 percent are referred.

She said these numbers are low compared with other communities.

“It’s a healthy community,” she said.

Wyatt said many of the patients who receive intervention drink alcohol or smoke marijuana. Some use cocaine or heroin.

Colorado was targeted for the program based on some significant substance-abuse statistics. A 2002 study by Harvard University ranked the state second in severity nationwide for overall substance-abuse problems. And a study by Columbia University found the state spends about \$202 million annually on health-care costs related to substance abuse.

Robert Allen can be contacted at (970) 668-4628 or [rallen@summitdaily.com](mailto:rallen@summitdaily.com).

<http://www.summitdaily.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080830/NEWS/808309985/1059/MOUNTAIN05&parentprofile=-1&template=printart>