



# HEALTH AWARENESS

## Health Professionals Need To Ask Gambling Questions

(NAPSA)—A growing body of research and clinical experience has given health care professionals new insight into the problem of pathological gambling.

Research shows that 2 to 3 percent of the population in the U.S. will have a gambling problem in any given year. While many people go to their primary care physician or mental health professional complaining of stress-related problems, they may not volunteer information about gambling. By asking some basic gambling questions, an aware health care practitioner can make a significant difference in a patient's life.

Here are three questions from the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), one of several effective screening assessments for problem gambling: Did you ever gamble more than you intended to? Have you ever felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble? Have you ever lost time from work (or school) due to betting money or gambling?

Pathological gambling has been seen primarily from moral, economic and social standpoints and has received little attention in the training of health providers. Much like other addictions, pathological gambling, if left untreated, can lead to grave mental health and physical health problems for the patient and cause considerable problems for the family.

Adverse health consequences of pathological gambling include depression, anxiety, insomnia, intestinal disorders, lower back pain, nervous disorders, weight loss or gain and physical exhaustion. Some pathological gamblers have committed white-collar



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crimes such as theft and embezzlement to support their gambling, and problem gamblers experience a higher rate of suicide than those with any other addiction.

Pathological gambling is often spoken of as a hidden addiction. Visual signs and symptoms are not readily apparent. There is no slurred speech or unsteady gait. Individuals are often reluctant to voluntarily mention their gambling and they do not see the connection to physical symptoms.

Physicians, nurses and mental health professionals can help their patients by asking a few simple questions. This can become as routine as asking about alcohol or smoking. An estimated 30 percent of individuals with drug or alcohol dependence also have gambling problems.

The National Problem Gambling helpline offers a toll-free number, (800) 522-4700, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.