

**Realistically, are venue-operators  
part of the wider intervention  
workforce?**

**Training of industry staff under the  
NZ harm-minimisation regulations**

**Alison Penfold**





# Estimates of problem gambling and help-seeking

- New Zealand research indicates 1.35% current moderate to severe (Abbott and Volberg 2000) of those in the population who have gambling problems, and 2002/2003 NZ Health Survey indicates 1.9%
- 2006/2007 Gaming & Betting Activities Survey indicates 9% gambled to a harmful level in last 12 months
- In NZ in 2006, a total of 2685 new full intervention face-to-face clients
- Volberg (2007) estimates that as few as 2% of those with gambling problems will present for help
- With brief and early interventions included in numbers presenting there were a total of 4744 interventions



# Early and Brief Interventions

- Many of the early and brief interventions occurred in a setting outside of the clinical setting – opportunistically, and this has raised the number of interventions significantly
- However, these were still delivered by problem gambling specialists, and doesn't of course take into account who else may have delivered an intervention to someone showing signs of a gambling problem



# Why don't people come forward for help?

- Fear of others finding out – (perhaps “being seen” at a service, which defines them with a “hidden” problem with social and moral stigma)
- Fear of family, friends, employer, social contacts and others finding out before the problems are dealt with sufficiently; so their instinct is to continue trying to bail themselves out until last possible moment, before disclosing
- Fear of “counselling”/admitting loss of control



# The Gambling Act 2003

- Section 308 of the Act states that venue operators must develop a policy for identifying problem gamblers and take all reasonable steps to identify actual or potential problem gamblers
- Section 309 states that venue managers and their representatives must approach customers reasonably believed to be problem gamblers and offer information/advice about PG/self-exclusion, or exclude self-identified problem gamblers



# Who are the Wider Workforce?

- It follows then, that venue operators throughout Aotearoa New Zealand working at race tracks, TAB outlets, pubs and clubs with TABs/self-service pods and gaming machines, casino operators and their staff operating all games, tables and EGMs, are responsible for identifying and intervening with their customers who may have gambling problems
- These staff members are required to have adequate training, so they can undertake this task and either offer advice and referral information (to Helpline/agencies) or intervene directly with strategies to minimise harm, including self-exclusion/exclusion procedures



# How large is this potential workforce?

- There are six casinos in New Zealand
- The biggest example is Sky City in Auckland, with approx 2800 employees, shifts operating over 24 hours, with a large percentage of staff having contact with customers
- There are 1600 class 4 venues and approx 795 TAB outlets (incl those in pubs/clubs) throughout New Zealand, all with a pool of trained employees who can intervene
- This amounts to many thousands of additional staff



# What is the rationale behind this particular part of the workforce?

- Problem gambling starts happening in venues, so early identification/intervention is possible
- These staff know their customers (and more about their gambling than anyone else) and most customers are “regulars”, so there can already be some familiarity, credibility and trust
- Staff know their customers over time, and changes over time are one of the more reliable signs of problem gambling
- There is a perception that because staff are “in the industry”, they have empathy and are understanding and won’t be judgemental about gamblers, so are appropriate to intervene



# What can make these interventions more successful?

- Customer relationships must be maintained, to make interventions more successful– if you bully or offend customers you lose future opportunity
- Interventions are an extension of host responsibility and demonstrate customer care – in many cases happening already, but not recognised as “an intervention” - reinforcement
- Even if a customer doesn't appear receptive to change, there is value in “planting a seed”
- We may never know who attends treatment services as a result of an intervention in a venue



# What can make these interventions more successful?

- Practice makes perfect – promote the value of using scenarios in the training
- Sharing information amongst staff members helps, not only for support, but no one person sees everything (get the “big picture”)
- Getting the person who has the best relationship with the customer to do the intervention has the best chance
- The nature of interventions is often personality driven and innovative – be natural and don't talk like you've just been to a training course!



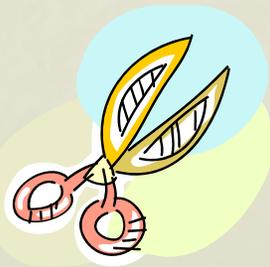
# What are we told works by this workforce (examples)

- Using humour to make the point inoffensively
- Setting limits on how much cash they give out on eftpos, to minimise spending/harm and not cashing cheques
- Not giving winnings out in cash, or holding them until next day, often with comments like “I know you’ll put it back in the machine if I give it to you now” (humour)
- Arranging with the customer prior to play (mutual agreement), that they won’t give money on eftpos on request, if the customer has been drinking a lot
- Repartee: “Isn’t it time you called it a day and went home to your wife – your dinner’s probably cold!”



# Anecdotal Example of an innovative approach

One regular customer who had a good relationship with a staff member, was often running out of money and started persistently requesting cash from the till for gambling. As a harm minimisation measure, the venue operator, said "if you come up one more time, I'll cut your card up with these scissors!" Shortly after, the customer came back and the venue operator raised an eyebrow looking at the scissors, and the customer said "I know, I know!", leaving the venue with money in his account.



# In Summary

Numbers presenting to specialist services have gone down over recent years

Projects identifying those presenting with gambling problems to non-specialist services have highlighted large numbers of problems when clients have been presenting for something else

The problem gambling workforce is large (and effective) when the numbers of workers opportunistically intervening are taken into account



# Industry staff as a critical part of the Workforce

Within this opportunistic workforce are industry staff who are obligated within law, but most importantly:

- they are undertaking this work already
- they have been intervening in their own way for some time
- they are for the most part “ready, willing and able”, and simply require the confidence to undertake this role.

END

