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Media Release

New Alcohol and Pregnancy Resource for Health Professionals

A new online resource has been launched to assist the many New Zealand healthcare professionals who say they don't feel adequately trained to discuss alcohol use with their pregnant patients.

Studies show up to 30 percent of New Zealand women drink during pregnancy and 50 percent still believe drinking some alcohol during pregnancy is safe – but that healthcare workers are often unsure how to speak with them.

Alcohol Healthwatch and the University of Otago, Wellington, have developed the Pregnancy and Alcohol Cessation Toolkit (PACT), an online resource to help health professionals use Ministry of Health guidelines when educating pregnant women about alcohol use. The project was funded by the Ministry of Health.

Principal author Dr Mark Huthwaite, from the University of Otago, Wellington, says drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to a range of developmental disorders and birth defects referred to collectively as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

“Given our understanding of these risks and the extent of drinking in New Zealand, it's important health professionals are well equipped to have these conversations with their pregnant clients.”

The PACT not only provides up-to-date evidence on the effects of alcohol during pregnancy, it also gives examples of how to effectively use that evidence in everyday practice.

It consists of four modules linked to other resources, clinical scenarios, self evaluation questionnaires and survey feedback, and can be used with any continuing professional education programme.

Project co-ordinator Christine Rogan from Alcohol Healthwatch says there has been a gap in clinical education on this important topic for too long.

“We believe this skill-based resource will go a long way to address that gap and we’ve been fortunate to have a highly skilled and collaborative team working on it. Early feedback suggests the resource is being positively received.”

Access to the PACT is freely available at www.akoatearora.ac.nz/projects/pact.

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