

# healthy limits

innovative program at Littleton Hospital helps educate

by suzy devers

**D**o you like to unwind at the end of a long day with a glass of wine? You're not alone. But how much is too much? According to the *Guidelines for Alcohol and Substance Use*, one serving of wine is just 5 ounces.

"It can be deceiving," says Kim Muramoto, R.N., director of trauma at Littleton Adventist Hospital. "A healthy weekly limit of alcohol is one serving per day for women and two servings per day for men." (See sidebar.)

## starting the conversation

To help educate the Littleton community about health consequences related to alcohol and substance use, Muramoto obtained a grant to bring SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment) to Littleton Adventist Hospital.

The SBIRT Colorado program treats alcohol and drug use like any other preventable healthcare issue. By screening each hospital patient about their alcohol and drug use, healthcare providers can have a motivational conversation with patients who might need to make a change. And patients experiencing abuse or addiction can be referred for proper treatment.

"The ultimate goal of SBIRT is to identify people who are not dependent upon alcohol or drugs, but who overuse or binge," says Muramoto. "Screenings and brief interventions lead to changed behaviors that reduce overall healthcare costs, criminal behavior, disability and even death."

According to SBIRT Colorado, nearly 30 percent of Americans, although not dependent on alcohol or other drugs, consume at a level that elevates their risk for causing physical, mental or social harm. Yet very few of these individuals are ever identified or educated about a potential problem.

Screening and brief intervention informs people about health consequences related to substance use and reinforces responsible health behaviors. This approach has proven to be successful in changing behavior and in improving health and quality of life.

## asking the right questions

The SBIRT program, overseen by Muramoto, includes two health educators, Linda Blasi, M.A., and Annette Barbour, B.A., who are trained to screen Littleton Adventist patients

## serving limits

	Daily limits	Weekly limits	Special occasions
Women	1	7	3
Men	2	14	4
Seniors (over 65)	1	7	3

for potential alcohol and substance use risk. Both Blasi and Barbour perform the SBIRT practice in the emergency room and throughout the hospital.

Within the privacy of a treatment room, Blasi asks each patient for permission to conduct a brief confidential screening that will reveal where he or she falls in terms of risk compared with other people in the community.

“I conduct nonjudgmental, motivational interviews with patients 18 years or over,” Blasi says. “Most people are open to the screenings and appreciate the opportunity to understand how alcohol and substance use affects their health through the brief intervention or education.”

**what’s in a serving?** Wine: 5 ounces (10% to 12% alcohol)  
Beer: 12 ounces (5% alcohol)  
Hard liquor: 1.5 ounces (40% alcohol)

## intervening when necessary

When Blasi identifies a patient who has risky consumption levels, she asks if he or she has considered quitting. She also recommends help, such as something called brief therapy or rehabilitation developed specifically for non-chronic users.

Brief therapy consists of one to eight meetings, depending on the patient’s needs. Blasi says brief therapy motivates people to set goals and to either cut back or quit. If patients do not wish to participate in the follow-up therapy, they are still educated during the confidential screening about how their consumption affects their health.

## did you know?

The typical restaurant wine glass can hold up to two and a half servings of wine when filled. Martinis sometimes contain two servings of alcohol and mixed drinks, like a vodka on the rocks, may contain even more.

The SBIRT program has helped a broad range of people, from suburban women who enjoy multiple glasses of wine in the evenings and seniors who combine medications with alcohol to pregnant women who expose their fetuses to damaging substances, college students who engage in recreational drugs and tobacco smokers who simply need a referral to the Colorado Quit Line. [v&v](#)



SBIRT Counselors Linda Blasi and Annette Barbour