

Case Study

Michael was admitted to the hospital after having seizures. Before being rescued by an ambulance, a neighbour said that Michael seemed to be confused and very agitated, and he seemed to be arguing with someone (e.g. shouting and throwing punches). He was referred to the hospital clinical health unit by the ward staff due to Michael's evident self-neglect and with the hope of finding him support. Michael is 48 years old and has been drinking heavily on a daily basis, beginning after work and continuing into the evening. On weekends he typically started to drink around noon and was quite intoxicated by dinner time. During a clinical interview, he recognised that his drinking was out of control and that he was indeed having adverse effects on both him and his wife Linda. They have begun arguing frequently. On several occasions, Michael broken dinnerware and punch holes in walls. The couple now saw friends infrequently.

Michael's childhood was rather uneventful. His father was an electrical engineer and his mother worked part-time in a local library once Michael and his older brother, James, were in school. Michael's mother and father were light drinkers – an occasional beer or glass of wine.

Michael began drinking in school, typically at house parties on weekends. He recalled that he found drinking very relaxing and that it reduced the anxiety he sometimes felt in social situations. He remembered that his anxieties were greatest when around women; he often felt tongue-tied and was unable to sustain conversations. After graduating, he went to college where he studied history and education. His goal was to become a history teacher. His drinking increased somewhat in college, both in amount and frequency. His drinking was no longer confined to weekends, and he typically drank six or more beer at a sitting. As he had said about his drinking in secondary school, he reported that he drank mostly to relax. He maintained decent grades but he recalled that his anxieties around women persisted. He met Linda at college in an art history class. They were immediately attracted to each other. Linda's social and conversational skills put Michael at ease, and they began seeing each other regularly. They married at the end of college. He took a job teaching A-levels in history, and Linda found work at a jewellery store. Because he aspired to become head of the history department, Michael enrolled in an evening MA programme at a local university. Michael recalled that these were very happy times.

Michael has been drinking regularly now, a couple of scotches before supper on weekdays and the usual scotches plus wine with dinner on the weekends. Linda joined him in a scotch before dinner, but only one. He remembered that when they went out for dinner with friends, he would wolf down two drinks before dinner while everyone else had only one. And when they were at a party, Michael would generally drink considerably more than anyone else. He claimed he needed the alcohol to feel at ease in social situations. This drinking pattern continued for several years.

Michael received his MA, and he and Linda had a son, Luke. Michael had tried to apply for various jobs to increase his income but he didn't get them, becoming increasingly frustrated, crushed and very angry. At the time Linda wasn't able to work due to a severe injury and they started to struggle financially, which made Michael feel stressed and overwhelmed with being the sole provider and carer for the family. His

drinking began to increase. He would secretly freshen up his scotch when Linda was out of the room, so he was probably having three or four instead of his usual two. After a while, Linda noticed that they were buying liqueur more often than usual and begun to suspect that Michael was drinking heavily. When she confronted him, he angrily denied it and changed his drinking pattern.

Several months later, Michael began drinking on the way home from work. He would stop at a liquor store, buy a half pint of brandy, and drink it on the way home. He was careful to vary the liquor store he stopped at and took back routes home to reduce the chance of being stopped by the police. Before getting home, he put the empty bottle in the trunk of his car, freshened his breath, and was ready to greet Linda and start in on the scotch. He began to fall asleep, possibly passing out, regularly after dinner. His after-work drinking led him to give up his afternoon football match, and he no longer was able to engage in any activities after dinner. He started forgetting appointments he had made. Linda was becoming increasingly upset. She having less and less interaction with Michael, and she was coming to believe that Michael must be drinking secretly.

After several months, Linda became fairly certain that Michael must be drinking outside the home. One day she checked his trunk and found a dozen brandy bottles. Beside herself with anger and anxiety, she confronted Michael, and an ugly argument ensued – the first of many. He became even more secretive about his drinking, now throwing the empties away before arriving home, but his drinking did not decrease. Linda left the house and moved in with her sister as she started to feel unsafe and fearful. Michael realized his drinking was out of control and made several attempts to cut back. Unfortunately, his resolve typically lasted a couple of days.