

## STEP 4: ARRANGE FOLLOW-UP

Arrange follow-up visits and monitor patient progress in the same way you manage other chronic medical problems such as hypertension. Recognize that behavioral change is an incremental process that may progress with stops and starts. Let the patient know that someone — you or a designated staff member — is always available for ongoing assistance.

### **At each subsequent visit, support your patient's efforts to cut down or abstain:**

- Review goals, progress, and lab results (if appropriate).
- For those who have made positive change: Congratulate, reinforce the change, and assess continued motivation for further change if needed.
- For those who have not made positive change: Express concern, acknowledge that change is difficult, offer encouragement, and assess motivation.
- Re-advise about sensible drinking levels; identify next goals, and problem-solve, if needed.
- Schedule the next visit.

### **For patients who need additional support:**

- Schedule a separate, focused follow-up visit.
- Refer for counseling if indicated.
- Consider suggesting that your patient bring a supportive friend or family member to follow-up visits.

### **In particular, for those patients you advised to abstain or referred for alcohol treatment:**

- Monitor symptoms of depression and anxiety. When these symptoms occur, they often decrease or disappear after two to four weeks of abstinence. If they persist, treatment may be required.
- Monitor gamma-glutamyl-transferase (GGT) levels, when appropriate, as a means of assessing alcohol treatment compliance. (Note: Not all dependent patients will have elevated GGT levels.)
- Ask the treatment center for periodic updates on your patient's treatment plans and prognosis.

