

Abstract

English title: Patients' experiences of using phosphatidylethanol (PEth) in primary care – a qualitative study

Background: Hazardous alcohol use is highly prevalent and increases the risk of numerous diseases and comorbidities, yet it often goes undetected among primary healthcare (PHC) patients. The use of the biomarker phosphatidylethanol (PEth) is becoming increasingly common in Swedish PHC, but studies exploring patients' perspectives regarding PEth sampling are scarce.

Aim: To investigate patients' experiences and perceptions of using PEth in the Swedish PHC.

Design and setting: A qualitative study with individual semi-structured interviews. The participants were recruited from three PHCs in Region Östergötland, Sweden, during 2024 and 2025.

Method: Individual interviews were conducted with six participants. The interviews were analyzed with qualitative content analysis with an inductive approach.

Results: Four categories emerged during the analysis: *Healthcare staff's communicative responsibility*, highlighting the need for clear and transparent information to build trust; *The importance of an interpersonal approach* emphasizing a respectful, non-judgmental approach enabling open dialogue with the patient; *PEth as an eye-opener* illustrating how the test can trigger awareness and motivation when followed by a supportive conversation; *Rights, responsibility and respect* reflecting the balance between the medical duty of the physician and respecting patient's autonomy.

Conclusion: PEth testing can be a meaningful and ethically justifiable tool in PHC when implemented with clear information, patients' involvement, and respectful interactions. The

test may function as a motivator and facilitate self-reflection on alcohol consumption.

However, the use of PEth requires careful clinical judgment on the part of the prescribing clinician. More extensive research is needed to strengthen and expand these findings, particularly regarding patients' experiences, perceptions, and needs in relation to PEth testing.

Key words: alcohol dependence, alcohol misuse, alcohol use disorder, phosphatidylethanol, primary care, qualitative research