



CENTRE FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF
BEST PRACTICES

INSIGHT 2011

Responding to Patrons
with Potential Gambling Problems

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PREAMBLE

Customer service in the gaming industry involves promoting an entertaining, positive experience for patrons and responding to their gaming-related needs. Because of their day-to-day involvement with patrons, gaming venue employees play a critical role in achieving customer service goals. Patrons who may have problems with gambling present a particular difficulty since they are usually among the more frequent patrons of the establishment and can often show visible signs of discontent to staff. Addressing these situations effectively is becoming increasingly important.

The Responsible Gambling Council's (RGC) Centre for the Advancement of Best Practices is pleased to present its findings from *Insight 2011*—a project aimed at developing a framework of best practices for gaming providers to respond to patrons who may have a gambling problem. The research includes:

- A review and analysis of the literature and materials from the gaming industry (e.g., policy documents, training materials),
- Interviews with gaming venue staff,
- Focus groups with gamblers who have experienced problems, and
- The *Insight Forum*, a two-day gathering of various gaming industry stakeholders, researchers, treatment providers, and gamblers to discuss, debate, and collect information on issues relevant to assisting patrons in the gaming venue.

The RGC wishes to thank the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation, the British Columbia Lottery Corporation, the British Columbia Government Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch, Fondation Mise Sur Toi, Loto-Québec, the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation, the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority, and the Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation for the financial support that made this review possible.

The RGC also thanks the many individuals who contributed to the review. These include the gamblers who participated in the focus groups, the gaming venue staff interviewed, and the individuals who attended *Insight Forum 2011*.

While this project results from the contributions of many, the work is a product of the RGC's analysis and the RGC assumes responsibility for its content.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The gaming industry invests considerable resources and energy in creating an entertaining and positive experience for patrons. For most patrons, the gambling experience is entertaining and positive. However, for some, this is not the case. Those who develop gambling problems are not gambling for entertainment.

Gaming venue employees often become aware of players who they believe have problems. Providing appropriate customer support to patrons exhibiting potential signs of a gambling problem can be a difficult and sensitive issue. Staff may be hesitant to step in, and may be unsure of the protocol for engaging with a patron who may be experiencing difficulty. Yet, gaming venue staff can play a critical role in responding to patrons—often regular patrons—who they suspect may have gambling problems.

This review identified numerous ways in which the process for responding to patrons suspected of gambling problems can be enhanced for the greater benefit of the patrons and the venues themselves. Clearly it is much better to address a suspected problem before that problem becomes fully blown. But the benefits reach beyond the individual with the gambling problem. Gaming staff tend to have a higher level of job satisfaction if they are working in an environment that they believe lives up to its own values and cares about its customers. Other customers benefit as well. A gambler with a full-blown problem can poison the gaming floor by begging for money, harassing staff, disturbing other patrons, and using up excessive amounts of staff time. Identifying and responding appropriately to signs of a problem presents an opportunity to interrupt the progression to more serious consequences.

There is no denying that the issues and challenges inherent in responding to patrons with potential gambling problems are many. First and foremost, a suspicion is not a fact until carefully assessed and verified. Most focus group participants supported being approached by trained venue staff about their gambling as long as it was carefully and competently managed. At the same time, many acknowledged that they might resent the attention in the short term. There was unanimity in the belief among the gamblers, however, that it is always better to do something rather than nothing.

Through the review process it became clear that although there may be some debate about the best means of tackling the issue, there is a shared interest in wanting to find better ways to respond to patrons with potential gambling problems. The review participants also provided considerable insight into the way these processes work now and how they could be improved. Many saw assistance to these customers as simply an extension of good customer service.

The *Insight 2011* project identified a framework for improving the process for responding to patrons suspected of gambling problems for the benefit to the patrons, as well the venues themselves. This project is the first report of its kind on this topic. The results will increase gaming staff capacity and strengthen a gaming venue's overall level of customer service.

Insight 2011 gathered and analyzed information from a wide range of sources, including:

- Research literature and gaming venue policies,
- Interviews with gaming staff,
- Focus groups with gamblers who have experienced gambling problems, and
- The Insight Forum, a two-day gathering of forty-five experts, professionals, and other stakeholders to discuss, debate, and collect information on issues relevant to assisting patrons who may have gambling problems.

Response Framework

In considering an appropriate way to respond to patrons who may have gambling problems, it is essential that gaming providers manage such situations following a clear set of guiding principles. From the review it is clear that all involved are looking for a process that is respectful, responsive, and systematic.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

There are three situations in which gaming venues can be alerted to a patron's potential gambling problem: (1) a patron may disclose a problem or request assistance, (2) a patron may show red flag behaviours (e.g., significant increase in gambling frequency), there may be an obvious incident (e.g., aggression towards staff), or (3) a third party may approach venue staff. Each situation is different and therefore, each response must be tailored to the circumstances.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

Both the focus groups and venue staff interviews suggest that direct requests for assistance are relatively rare. However, since any venue employee may be approached by a patron with a request for assistance, all employees need to be equipped with proper training in how to respond. In this situation, the goal is to provide the patron with options or information specific to their request and to help connect them with an appropriate source of assistance.

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem but Does not Request Assistance

Gaming venue staff may observe red flag behaviours that indicate a potential gambling problem.

Red flags are categorized into two groups:

Behaviours— These refer to actions by patrons which have been identified through a series of studies and staff observations (e.g., chasing losses, multiple ATM withdrawals, escalating betting). To avoid uncertainty and confusion, it is important to provide frontline staff with a concise set of obvious observable indicators rather than a long list of subtle ones. Instructions should also clearly specify when a frontline staff member should report a suspicion to a supervisor. The reporting of a suspicion will normally require three elements: red flags, red flags observed on multiple occasions, and gambling escalation.

Incidents—Much easier to identify, incidents are more obvious negative actions that usually generate an immediate corporate response (e.g., leaving a children unattended, sleeping in the venue, hitting a machine, visible distress).

3. Third Party Indicates Patron Has A Gambling Problem

The third way that a venue may become aware of a potential gambling problem among one of its patrons is from a friend or family member of the patron approaching the venue staff with concerns. There is no doubt that problem gambling can have devastating impacts on significant others in the gambler's life, and it is therefore important that these concerns are addressed in a sensitive manner by providing information and referral to available help resources.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

The Hallmarks of an Effective Response Framework

In considering an appropriate way to respond to patrons who may have gambling problems, it is essential that gaming providers respond to such situations adhering to a clear set of guiding principles. From the review it is clear that all involved looked for a process incorporating the following principles:

Respect

- Any organizational response to a customer who may have a gambling problem should first carefully assess whether or not a real problem exists, and tailor a response based on that patron's to circumstances.

- Any approach or discussion of a potential problem should be conducted in a non-judgemental manner in a discrete setting.
- Organizations must make customers aware of any organizational processes that monitor play.

Responsive

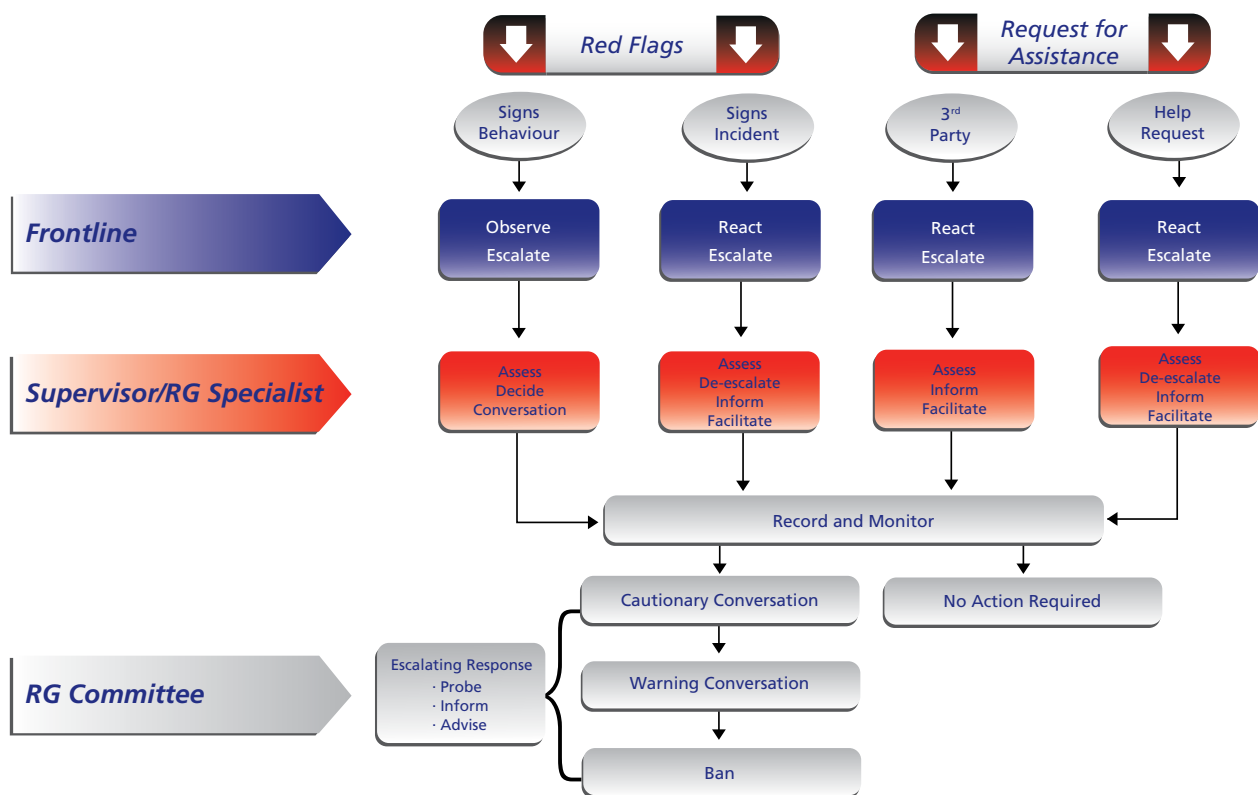
- The organization does not ignore the red flags and sets policies and procedures in place that specify appropriate and planned action by staff.

Systematic

- The organization responds in a systematic way, which includes documentation of the action taken and clear protocols for decision making.

The Figure below depicts the sequence of responses to the signs and incidents that lead venue staff to suspect that a patron may have a problem with gambling. Since venue staff may become aware of a potential problem in several ways, there are a number of considerations that are essential to the response process. The considerations fall into three categories: monitoring and interactions, follow-up and documentation and involuntary exclusions.

Response Framework Schematic



1. Monitoring and Interactions

Responding to Patrons Requesting Help

Staff need to have a clear set of instructions about how to respond that are simple, helpful, and direct. They should let the patron know that the venue has dedicated staff available to provide them with more information, and then accompany the patron to the appropriate supervisor or RG Specialist. It is important this conversation take place in a discreet and comfortable location, out of the sight of other patrons. As important as the response by frontline staff, the subsequent actions taken by the supervisor or RG Specialist are critical. The supervisor has four important tasks: assess the situation that generated the concern, de-escalate if necessary, provide information targeted to the request and facilitate contact with specialized professionals both onsite and in the community.

Responding to Patrons Exhibiting Signs of A Gambling Problem

Staff members will at times observe signs that a patron may have a gambling problem, either based on an incident or behavioural or red flag indicators.

Incidents

Gaming staff generally have very clear instructions regarding their responsibilities and the required response to a wide range of incidents. Generally, incidents are escalated to a supervisor or security staff. These individuals have a critical role in assessing the situation and determining next steps. If they suspect that the incident involves a potential gambling problem, they need to inform the patron about sources of assistance and self-exclusion programs. They should also facilitate contact with more specialized professionals. Incidents should be documented in the appropriate database.

Behaviours

Most staff are uncertain about what to do when they observe red flag behaviours. It is the responder's core responsibility to escalate observed patron behaviour to the appropriate supervisor or RG Specialist who will then assess the situation and decide what action is appropriate. Where the information collected appears to confirm that there may be a problem, the supervisor should initiate contact with the patron and document the details of the concern and response in the appropriate database. Gamblers in the focus group and gaming staff stressed the need to approach with caution and be prepared for a negative reaction.

The review found strong support for monitoring patrons demonstrating signs of a potential gambling problem in order to be able to establish an increase in number or severity of warning signs. The capacity to monitor and document interactions with patrons serves three functions. First, it serves to establish a baseline to see if observed signs are persistent or a onetime occurrence. Second, it provides the gaming provider with systematic information on which to make any further decisions. Third, it can be used in combination with other information (i.e. play data) to create a more complete picture of player behaviours.

If after a period of monitoring a decision is reached to initiate a conversation with the player, there are characteristics deemed essential in all patron interactions: not interrupting play, ensuring privacy, approaching in a respectful and non-judgmental manner, being informed about the patron and their circumstances, having the appropriate training to deal with resistance, and providing take away materials.

2. Follow-up and Documentation

It is quite possible that a patron could have some difficulties with their gambling and self-correct. They may have a conversation with a staff member and recognize that they are crossing the line. But, what if they don't? What happens if gaming staff and supervisors take the steps noted above and continue to see the same or escalating problems? At that point, the circumstance necessitates greater escalation. It is no longer appropriate to leave the decision-making process to an individual supervisor, but rather has become a corporate issue requiring a corporate response. Where suspicions are confirmed and grow there is a greater need for more than monitoring and conversation. There is a need for a planned organizational response lead by an RG team tasked with addressing patrons whose gambling problems have moved beyond suspicion to reasonable certainty. While they have different names and slightly differing mandates, such vigilance or RG teams are in place in many jurisdictions already. That team should be tasked with monitoring patrons with potential gambling problems and devising interactions appropriate to their circumstances. The team would assemble all relevant data regarding behaviours, incidents, and play history, and consult with knowledgeable venue staff about strategies to manage the customer interaction.

It is highly likely at this stage that the venue designates arrange a meeting with the patron to note the organization's concern and to provide feedback to the individual about the staff observations. This meeting has several benefits. First and foremost, it can provide clear information to the patron about the venue's concern and promote a change in the patron's gambling. It is also evidence of action by the venue to address the issue in the case where the patron continues to exhibit signs of high-risk gambling.

The team would typically take the following course of action:

- Identify an appropriate individual to meet with the customer to express the concerns of the venue,
- Invite the player to a meeting in a discrete location,
- Convey the concerns of the venue and seek the views of the individual,
- Provide any help information that is appropriate,
- Express continued offer of assistance, and
- Advise that the venue is continuing to monitor the situation.

After subsequent monitoring, if the team believes that the patron is continuing to worsen, the team is likely to need to meet once again to express greater urgency and recommend alternatives such as visit limitations, cessation of loyalty club benefits, self-exclusion, and the potential for involuntary exclusion.

Documentation Systems

At present, there are a variety of customer information tracking systems in place in gaming venues. Some of these systems already have capability to effectively monitor, record, and communicate information related to observing and interacting with patrons. In fact, some are being used for just those purposes.

Having systematic records will help staff better assess patron risk levels and determine appropriate actions. It also rectifies the current snapshot approach by providing staff with a more complete picture of the patron. In the future, with the development of play analytic systems, it will be possible to assemble information from player behaviours and incidents, play history, and play analysis to provide a multi-faceted picture of the player's activities to support any monitoring or actions on the part of the venue.

There are existing technologies, particularly for EGMs and online gambling, that can help operators to identify red flag behaviours associated with play patterns and to monitor unsafe play patterns. Online gaming has an inherent technological infrastructure that allows it to monitor all play activity on the gaming site and to document gambling frequency and play patterns. Similarly, loyalty cards associated with EGMs and other card-based gambling can monitor a person's gambling activity and allow for a more accurate assessment of gambling frequency, spending, and other behavioural indicators of problem gambling.

3. Involuntary Exclusions

In practice, there are few situations in which a patron is involuntarily excluded for displaying problem gambling signs. The most common situation leading to involuntary exclusion is when a patron exhibits violent or aggressive behaviour. The review indicated that there are other circumstances where a patron might benefit from a more active form of break (e.g., continued problematic gambling after a previous self-exclusion agreement). Such action should not be based on suspicion but on a well-documented gambling problem. Situations that may lead a patron to be involuntarily excluded need to be clearly defined. Involuntary exclusion is a last resort to be used if all other attempts to assist failed.

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

Moving from a reactive to an active approach in addressing potential gambling-related problems in a venue requires aligning expectations and protocols throughout the organization.

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

It is important for gaming organizations to have clear policies that guide staff in key areas such as responding to patrons suspected of having gambling problems. Ideal procedures for responding to patrons with potential gambling problems include:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all positions,
- An RG interaction role assigned to specialized and dedicated personnel,
- Staff training with refresher courses for all employees conducted by specialized staff,
- A process for documentation and feedback, and
- A communication plan that informs patrons of the venue's commitment, policies, and practices.

Informing Patrons of Venue's Practices

Gamblers in the focus groups and discussions at the forum stressed the importance of informing patrons of the venue's practices regarding patrons with a potential gambling problem. They believed that if patrons knew the venue's policies beforehand, they would be more receptive to ensuing conversations regarding their gambling. It also would make it easier and more comfortable for venue staff to initiate these conversations if patrons were aware that they may be approached.

Engaging Frontline Staff

There are clear benefits to providing feedback to staff who bring suspicions of a gambling problem to the attention of their supervisor, including providing staff with positive reinforcement and giving them more confidence to take on this role. And while it is important to escalate up to a supervisor, the supervisor may not always be the right person to initiate a discussion with a patron. Patrons requesting assistance are more likely to approach someone they feel a connection with and who is familiar (e.g., frontline staff). In this instance, it might be beneficial for the frontline staff to provide information to the customer or even initiate conversations, playing a facilitative role in establishing contact with the most appropriate person. That said, the decision to take any action should ultimately be in the hands of the RG specialist or supervisor.

2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

A number of participants stressed the importance of providing patrons who are involved in any conversation or formal interaction with written material they could review in less stressful moments, away from the venue.

Responsible Gaming Centre

The review clearly highlighted the importance of skilled staff conducting interactions. It found support for an increased role for Responsible Gaming Centre staff. In many jurisdictions, staff at these RG centres are not allowed to interact with patrons on the gaming floor. Conversations are limited to events, or when a patron enters the centre. There is an opportunity to make greater use of the centre staff's skill set by expanding their role in patron interactions.

Concluding Comment

The patron interaction process has been in transition for many years from a 'look the other way' model to an individual response and assistance model. This shift is widely supported by those with gambling problems, gaming operators, and specialists in problem gambling. Improvements to the current ways of responding involve adjustments to most elements of the process—from the way it is promoted to the way it is administered.

INTRODUCTION

Gaming providers invest considerable resources and energy in creating an entertaining, positive experience for patrons. And, for most patrons, gambling is entertaining and positive. But, for some, gambling is not a positive experience. People who develop gambling problems are not having a good time. They are not gambling for entertainment. They will, in all likelihood, harm themselves, their families, and undermine the enjoyment of other patrons and staff.

Gaming employees often become aware of players who they believe have gambling problems. But, for a variety of reasons, they are reluctant to act on their suspicions. They may question their own judgment about the situation. They may not want to get involved in what might be a sensitive personal matter. They may believe that it is not their business or that management will not support their involvement. They may not be aware of options to help those they suspect have gambling problems.

This report is the result of an in-depth look at the response of gaming employees to people they believe may have a gambling problem. This report looks at the issue from the perspective of gamblers who have had problems, gaming staff, and management; the research on this issue; and the views of counsellors and RG specialists.

In a previous report the RGC examined the best ways to assist patrons in making informed decisions about their gambling. The focus of that report was preventative. This report focuses on the other end of the spectrum and is intended to assist gaming providers in effectively responding to patrons who they believe have gambling problems.

Evolving Insights

In recent years there has been a considerable refinement in assessing the signs, often referred to as red flags, related to a gambling problem. Some of that new information has come from research. Much of this new information was generated in the gaming setting, as gaming providers have increased their attention to staff training and introduced programs to help identify potential gambling problems. This trend will only continue as account-based gaming and new player analytics provide greatly enhanced customer information. As more and more is known about player behaviours and problematic play there will be increasing expectations for appropriate use of that information.

The RGC Centre for the Advancement of Best Practices is pleased to present its findings from *Insight 2011*—a project aimed at developing a framework of best practices for gaming providers to respond to patrons who may have a gambling problem. The development of such a framework can strengthen a gaming venue's customer service by addressing the needs of this small, but important, segment of their clientele.

This project investigates this topic under three main headings:

I. Pathways to Concern: Ways Gaming Staff Come to Believe A Patron May Have A Gambling Problem

1. Patron requests assistance
2. Patron exhibits signs of a potential gambling problem but does not request assistance
3. Third party indicates a patron has a gambling problem

II. The Organizational Response: Steps Taken to Respond to A Potential Problem

1. Monitoring and Interactions
2. Follow-up and Documentation
3. Involuntary Exclusion

III. Policy and Administrative Context

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training
2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

Each chapter of the report addresses some or all of these topics using different information sources. Chapter One reviews the available research literature, and policy and procedure documents. Chapter Two draws together input gained from interviews with gaming venue employees. Chapter Three presents the results of the focus groups conducted with individuals who have first-hand experience of gambling problems. Chapter Four presents the main findings and themes that emerged from the two-day forum of experts, industry stakeholders, and gamblers. Chapter Five, the concluding chapter, offers the RGC's framework of best practices based on its consideration and analysis of information presented in the preceding chapters.

Insight 2011 is the first comprehensive report on this topic and the results will increase gaming staff capacity and strengthen a gaming venue's overall level of customer service.

METHODOLOGY

Information Sources

Insight 2011 collected information from multiple sources:

1. Literature Review

The RGC reviewed national and international research literature, and policy and regulatory documents related to gaming venue employee concerns about patrons, problem gambling signs among patrons, patron interactions, gaming venue employee training, and other relevant topics.

2. Stakeholder Training and Procedures Review

The RGC reviewed stakeholder policies and procedures, and employee training materials on problem and responsible gambling (RG) and customer service, to learn how gaming providers train their employees to handle difficult situations with patrons. The RGC also reviewed and analyzed any systems of monitoring and documenting employee–patron interactions to assess the types and prevalence of different situations that employees encounter and their responses to such situations. Lastly, some data related to self-exclusion program administration, particularly on the introduction or request and sign-up process, was examined since patron interactions that involve self-exclusion can often be highly sensitive and emotional situations. The jurisdictions that provided these materials are listed in Appendix A.

3. Interviews with Gaming Venue Employees

The RGC conducted interviews with gaming venue employees to understand how employees respond or would respond to situations where they are concerned about a patron's gambling, to identify the issues they face in such situations, and to determine any guidance and training needs to better prepare employees to effectively respond to such situations.

Participants were recruited through project stakeholders. Each stakeholder provided a list of employees who were then contacted by email or telephone. Only those employees in supervisory positions or on the frontlines who interact with patrons on a daily basis were eligible for participation.

4. Focus Groups

The RGC conducted three focus groups with gamblers who have experienced problems. The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the types of interactions gamblers have had with gaming staff and to identify effective ways for staff to approach and engage with patrons.

Participants were recruited through an Ontario treatment centre. Potential participants were screened by a treatment professional at the centre to determine their eligibility.

5. Insight Forum

RGC held a two-day forum that brought together various gaming industry stakeholders, field experts (e.g., researchers, treatment providers), and gamblers to discuss and share knowledge in an effort to understand how best to handle situations in the venue involving patrons who may have gambling problems. Forum participants listened to special presentations from experts on various topics (e.g., assisting patrons, motivational interviewing, and early problem gambling detection) and participated in breakout groups and large forum discussions.

Analysis of Best Practices for Responding to Patrons Who May Have Problems

The RGC carefully considered and synthesized the findings from all information sources to identify the policies, practices, and procedures that are likely to facilitate successful outcomes for responding to patrons with problems.

This chapter presents the findings from the review of the available research literature, as well as the stakeholder training and procedures documents and materials provided by several gaming companies.

The research review is based on national and international literature, while the policy review is based on policies and procedures documents of gaming venues specifically in Canadian, European, and Australian gaming jurisdictions.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

In a study of how frontline hospitality staff respond to patrons with gambling problems in Australian gaming venues, researchers observed that gaming staff members are generally the first point of contact for patrons looking for help for gambling problems (Hing & Nuske, 2011). Part of this may be attributed to the personal relationships that frequently develop between patron and staff (see Productivity Commission, 2009).

There are three main situations in which gaming venue staff can become concerned about a patron and their gambling (Hing & Nuske, 2011):

1. A patron directly requests assistance for a gambling problem;
2. A patron exhibits signs of a gambling problem or a potential problem but does not directly request assistance; or
3. A third party indicates a patron has a gambling problem.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

The most obvious situation for a gaming staff employee to learn of a patron's gambling problem is when a patron makes a direct request or disclosure. All of the Canadian jurisdictions we examined had policies and training in place to equip staff in responding. Generally, the recommended response is to provide information on voluntary self-exclusion, educational materials (e.g., brochures), or contact information to other services (e.g., helpline, Responsible Gaming Information Centres).

While this case may be the most straightforward situation to which staff can respond, there is research that indicates direct requests for help are infrequent (Hing & Nuske, 2011).

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem but Does not Request Assistance

Gaming venue staff can become concerned about a patron when staff notices some type of outward sign that the patron has or may have a problem with their gambling. When a patron displays severe frustration, aggression, or other negative behaviour due to their gambling, it is relatively easy to initiate some type of action. In fact, it is often only under these severe circumstances where an employee feels it is appropriate to intervene with a patron because the implications are obvious (see Hing & Nuske, 2011). Besides being problematic for the patron, such extreme behaviour often disrupts the general gaming environment and other patrons.

Patrons with gambling problems, however, do not always exhibit such extreme behaviour and there are many cases where the outward signs are less disruptive. There is research on identifying practical markers for identifying patrons who may be having problems with their gambling in the venue. In an early literature

review of research on signs of problem gambling, Allcock et al. (2002) highlighted a number of behavioural indicators from the research and concluded that the most consistent sign was daily out-of-pocket loss. Other strong indicators were repeated agitation after each loss; repeated cash withdrawals, borrowing, or attempts to cash cheques; playing until all funds are exhausted and complaining of a lack of money; and excessive frequency and prolonged duration of gambling sessions.

Schellink and Schrans (2004) asked video lottery players, including those with gambling problems, to complete a checklist of items that consisted of behavioural, emotional, and physiological symptoms experienced during gambling. Some of the observable symptoms that were more likely to be reported by players with problems were sickness or nausea, sadness or depression, three or more hours of gambling, money-borrowing, shaking while gambling, sweating, and nervousness or edginess.

Haefeli and Schneider (2006) developed a set of criteria for problem gambling patrons based on interviews with gaming venue employees and regular gambling patrons. Haefeli and Schneider concluded that the characteristics of problem gamblers centered on frequency and duration of play, raising gambling funds, betting behaviour (e.g., raising bets, immediately betting winnings), and anti-social behaviour (e.g., avoiding contact with others, visiting venue alone, being impolite to staff).

Delfabbro et al., (2007) conducted perhaps the most comprehensive and extensive study on the characteristics of problem gamblers using a multi-methodological design. They developed statistical models to predict problem gambling and found that on the whole, considerable displays of agitation or nervousness while gambling and crying after losing indicated an 80% probability of having a significant gambling problem. The researchers also reported some specific gender differences— males who gambled for long periods, sweat heavily, and found it difficult to stop gambling when the venue was closing had over an 80% chance of having significant problems; whereas women who were very agitated, struck machines, or made multiple cash withdrawals were 90% likely to have a gambling problem.

While these were some of the stronger findings, Delfabbro and colleagues provided a list of other indicators that could be used to identify problem gambling in the venue (see Table 1).

Table 1: Indicators of High Risk in a Venue (Delfabbro et al., 2007)

Frequency Duration and Intensity
1. Gambles every day of the week
2. Gambles for three hours or more without a break of 15 minutes or longer
3. Gambles so intensely that the person barely reacts to what was going on around him or her
4. Bets quickly after each bet
5. Bets \$2.50 or more per spin most of the time
6. Rushes from one machine or gaming table to another
7. Gambles on two or more machines at once (where this is allowed)
8. Spends more than \$300 in one session of gambling
9. Significant changes in expenditure pattern, e.g., sudden increases in spending
Impaired Control
1. Stops gambling only when the venue is closing
2. Gambles right through usual lunch break or dinner time
3. Finds it difficult to stop gambling at closing time
4. Starts gambling when the venue is opening

Social Behaviours

1. Asked venue staff to not let other people know that they are there
2. Has friends or relatives call or arrive at the venue asking if the person is still there
3. Is rude or impolite to venue staff
4. Avoids contact, communicates very little with anyone else
5. Stays on to gamble while friends leave the venue
6. Becomes very angry if someone takes the person's favourite machine or spot in the venue
7. Brags about winning or makes a big show relating to how skilful he or she is as a gambler
8. Stands over other players while waiting for his or her favourite machine

Raising Funds/ Chasing Behaviour

1. Gets cash out on two or more occasions to gamble (e.g., cash withdrawals at venues)
2. Asks to change large notes at venues before gambling
3. Borrows money from other people at venues
4. Asks for a loan or credit from venues
5. Puts large win amounts back into the machine and keeps playing
6. Leaves the venue to find money to continue gambling
7. Observed rummaging around in purse or wallet for additional money
8. Appears to have run out of all money including all money in purse or wallet when they leave venue

Emotional Responses

1. Seen to be shaking (while gambling)
2. Sweats a lot (while gambling)
3. Looks nervous/ edgy (e.g., leg switching, bites lip continuously)
4. Vocally displays anger (e.g., swears to themselves, grunts)
5. Kicks or violently strikes machines with fists
6. Looks very sad or depressed (after gambling)
7. Cries after losing a lot of money
8. Sits with head in hand after losing
9. Plays machine very roughly and aggressively (e.g., with fists or slaps)
10. Shows significant changes in mood during sessions

Irrational Attributions / Behaviours

1. Blames venues or machines for losing
2. Complains to staff about losing
3. Swears at machines or venue staff because they are losing
4. Compulsively rubs belly of machine or screen while playing

Other Behaviours

1. Significant decline in personal grooming or appearance over several days

Several jurisdictions have programs to identify patrons with existing gambling problems, and patrons who are at increased risk. For instance, all gaming venues in Switzerland must adopt preventative measures (i.e., the “Social Concept”), which includes the early detection of patrons who show signs of a possible problem gambling. This list of problem gambling signs in patrons includes behaviours such as begging for money, declaring problems in social or family life, playing until no cash is left, chasing losses, waiting outside the casino before it opens, regular gambling, emotional overreactions, and increasing visit frequency and duration (Lischer, 2010).

Holland Casinos also has a system for identifying patrons who may have problems. In this case the primary indicator of a potential problem is the number of visits to a gaming venue. The visitor registration system monitors all patrons’ visits. Visiting frequency and patterns are used to identify patrons with potential problems. Patron visits are monitored and the system is able to detect any increases in visits for regular, irregular, and even new guests. When an increase has been identified, the system monitors the specific individual’s subsequent visiting frequency and patterns. Patrons who visit ten times in one month within the past three months, and young adults who visit six times in one month, are flagged for showing early warning signs of problem gambling. Adults who visit fifteen times in one month during a three-month period, and young adults who visit eight times in one month are identified as possible problem gamblers (Van Kastel, 2008). In addition, each casino has an incident registration system that keeps records of observation reports, incidents, special circumstances relating to guests and misconduct, and staff–patron interview notes. These records can be used to identify patrons whom staff should be concerned about (Bes, 2002).

3. Third Party Indicates A Patron has A Gambling Problem

It is not uncommon for a family member or friend of a patron to approach a gaming venue employee to express a fear that the patron has a gambling problem. This case is the least prevalent of the three situations (Hing & Nuske, 2011) but when it does occur, it often involves a person requesting an exclusion ban for someone close to them.

In Canada, the most common approach to responding to third-party concerns about a patron’s gambling behaviour is to offer help resources to the concerned party such as information on problem gambling, a helpline number, and contact information for local counselling services.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

1. Monitoring and Interactions

In Canadian jurisdictions, when frontline staff believes a patron is demonstrating signs of a gambling problem, the most common response was to ‘report up’ or escalate the incident by passing on the information to another employee who is more senior and has greater authority to address the situation more directly. The supervisor may act on the information themselves or bring in a specially designated person who is responsible for initiating action. This designated person may be a senior staff member (e.g., supervisor) or specially trained staff (e.g., security, RG trained staff) member, but in some jurisdictions, the person may be an individual who is external to the gaming venue such as a Responsible Gaming Information Centre (RGIC) staff employee. The specially designated individuals are authorized and trained to initiate a conversation with the patron if they feel it is warranted, although they can decide to use other options. These options lie on a continuum from no approach to indirect approaches to more direct, confronting approaches.

The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation (SaskGaming) has a more technically supported play monitoring and interaction systems. Through its iCare system, SaskGaming’s casinos are able to monitor the electronic gaming machine (EGM) play patterns and assess for risk of developing a potential gambling problem. The system uses the play activity that is tracked through the player loyalty program to identify patterns of play that may suggest an individual is having difficulty with their gambling (e.g., chasing losses or sudden increases in play). When someone shows such patterns, iCare staff will interact with the player and begin to specifically monitor that person’s behaviour to see if it is a long-term trend. If so, further action may be

warranted. An RG specialist will take a moment to observe and monitor these behaviours before initiating an interaction with the patron. Interactions can include discussing topics such as how gambling works, money management strategies, or promoting realistic expectations and RG behaviours. An interaction is also initiated if a player on the gaming floor is observed exhibiting red flag behaviours such as swearing, hitting slot machine buttons, or other signs of distress.

In Quebec, when a frontline staff member has notified security staff, an investigator notes the information in a Cardex system and notifies the Vigilance Committee (i.e., special RG staff members). The Vigilance Committee will determine the course of action, whether it be to further monitor the patron or to initiate a conversation. The committee monitors the patron, including any player card play, physical behaviours in the venue, and noted interactions with staff or other patrons for three months. After this period, the committee will evaluate the patron and decide if any action is warranted. The committee will close a file on a patron if there is reason to believe that the patron is no longer showing signs of a problem. If the situation gets worse the committee will decide either to approach the individual or to prevent the individual from entering the casino.

Other jurisdictions such as Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Quebec train frontline staff to observe and to pass on the information to supervisors who will decide if any further action is necessary.

Frontline staff in Manitoba also note customer red flag behaviours, and report these to venue supervisors and managers, who then continue to monitor for increasing numbers of red flags over time. These observation recordings are used to decide if and when a patron should be approached.

In most places, the information that is gained through observation of patrons who may have problems is not officially recorded in any formal documentation system. Generally, this information is passed along from frontline staff to gaming supervisors to senior management either verbally or through email. If the patron exhibits seriously disruptive behaviour or is involved in an altercation with staff—whether the incident is problem gambling-related or not—the patron and their interaction with staff may be documented in the shift log or customer dealing logs. This documentation tends to be short, general, and basic in detail, and is used to inform other shift managers of what happened.

One of the more recent developments in identifying signs of a potential gambling problem in gaming venues is the monitoring and assessing of the actual play of patrons. This approach, usually involving play algorithms, assesses gambling behaviour based on actual betting patterns and characteristics, and is applied to those forms of gambling that are closely monitored. SaskGaming utilizes its iCare program to identify patrons whose behaviour indicates they may need some type of assistance. iCare analyzes player data obtained from the player loyalty card system to measure risk for problem gambling. Those identified as being at risk may be singled out for some further action by the RG. The Swedish online gaming operator, Svenska Spel, offers Playscan to its online and VLT players, which analyzes a player's current play patterns and provides them with an assessment of their gambling risk.

When deciding whether or not to approach a patron, gaming supervisors and other senior staff will first continue to monitor the patron to gain further information on the frontline staff member's initial claims. Often, staff will identify windows of opportunity to engage in a casual conversation with the patron in hopes of indirectly observing any further red flags in their behaviour or communications. This observation may continue over days or weeks if the staff member is unsure about the patron's status. If the staff observes more red flag behaviours, they will report the patron to senior management who will then discuss and decide whether a more serious and direct intervention is warranted.

Approaching patrons about their gambling can be a very difficult and intimidating task. Research suggests that while frontline staff are likely to approach a patron who shows extreme signs of distress or disruption, they are less confident in approaching a patron who hints or shows more subtle signs of a gambling problem and is not requesting assistance (Hing & Nuske, 2011). Further, on the rare occasions when a staff employee did approach a patron showing subtle problem gambling signs, they were unlikely to offer discussion or help for a gambling problem. Nor were they likely to offer any definitive answers in terms of what actions

the patron should take. Overall, staff skills for providing assistance to patrons showing more subtle signs of gambling problems are poor. Most staff stated this situation was challenging because they do not know what to say and were fearful of adverse reactions from the patron (Hing & Nuske, 2011).

Despite the lack of confidence among frontline staff in Hing and Nuske's (2011) study, all the jurisdictions in this study but one allow certain designated staff members to approach patrons whom they believe are having problems. Nonetheless, such approaches tend to be very restricted in that signs of problem gambling have to be extremely obvious and certain to justify an approach. One jurisdiction does not allow staff to approach patrons if they suspect they have a problem. In this jurisdiction, a player must request assistance before staff are allowed to take action. This policy is based on the belief that the player has to realize for themselves that they have a problem, and unless the realization is made explicit to staff, staff should not interfere.

In most of the jurisdictions examined, approaching patrons was under the authority of senior management, security, or specialized RG staff. Each jurisdiction has policies and procedures for approaching patrons suspected of having a gambling problem. The policies and procedures generally advocate that staff approach in a non-judgmental and non-confrontational manner (e.g., by feeling out a patron). At the Atlantic Lottery, for example, if staff sees signs that point to problematic behaviours, they will approach a player in a customer-service related way to ensure that everything is alright, and if needed, open the door for further conversation. In some jurisdictions staff are instructed to take patrons to a safe, private, and quiet place to talk with them. The practice is particularly common for patrons inquiring about self-exclusion.

a. Purpose of approach

Gaming staff may approach a patron for various reasons when they believe the patron may have a gambling problem.

i. Create a break in play

Staff may disrupt the patron to temporarily create a break in play. Disrupting their play may be as simple as offering to buy the person a coffee or meal. By interjecting into their gambling, the staff indirectly stops the player from gambling and gives them an opportunity to step away and hopefully reflect on their behaviour or regain control. While there will be patrons who find this practice annoying or upsetting, there is research evidence to suggest that patrons actually support the idea that staff should intervene in some way if they notice a patron has been gambling for a long period of time (e.g., discourage them or make them aware of time spent gambling) (Hing, 2005).

ii. Provide general RG tips and information about gambling

Another reason for approaching a patron who may have a problem is to give them RG tips (e.g., play with what you can afford) or general information about gambling (e.g., how gambling works). For example, SaskGaming's RG Specialists may provide RG information to a player based on how their conversation with a gambler progresses. For example, if the patron complains about the machines not paying out properly, staff will use that complaint as a springboard into a discussion of how the machines work, the cost of play, or what the player has control over. Staff also may provide the patron with some reading material. This approach does not frame the interaction in terms of helping someone with gambling problems, but more like a general knowledge conversation about how the games work or some other aspect of gambling that the person may have a misunderstanding about.

iii. Raise awareness of patron's gambling

The gaming venue may also approach a patron to provide information that raises the patron's awareness of their own gambling. Playscan offers online gaming patrons in Sweden information about their gambling activity. Playscan is an optional, patron-initiated program that does not directly confront a patron about any staff-perceived problems, but rather indirectly motivates patrons to reflect on their own behaviour by providing specific information about their own play (e.g., frequency of play and expenditure) and any risky behaviours in which they are engaging (e.g., chasing losses).

The program also classifies players on their level of risk using a traffic light system: “green” (gamblers are under control), “yellow” (gamblers exhibit negative behavioural changes), and “red” (gambling is no longer enjoyable). Risk levels can be measured for current and future behaviour (e.g., next 3 months).

Patrons who become concerned about their gambling through Playscan are offered specific RG information that is tailored to their situation (e.g., problem gambling resources) as well as given further opportunity to assess and reflect on their own behaviour. They may be encouraged to take a self-administered risk assessment test that covers behaviours beyond their gambling (e.g., consequences to other areas of their life) and thereby inducing further reflection on their gambling. Ultimately, Playscan is designed to “awaken the players’ curiosity”¹ and raise awareness of their gambling behaviour.

iv. Provide warnings and limitations

As gaming staff become more concerned about a patron’s gambling, they may approach with a more direct intent of helping patrons limit their behaviour. Staff may provide patrons with information, advice, or guidance on how they can restrict their gambling. One way to restrict gambling is to enter a self-exclusion program in which a patron enters into an agreement with the gaming venue to not enter the venue for a certain period of time. If the patron is observed in the venue during that time, the venue can remove them from the property and impose additional penalties (e.g., a trespassing charge). All of the jurisdictions examined have a self-exclusion program available to patrons and research indicates that offering self-exclusion is the most common response for staff when a patron approaches them for help (Hing & Nuske, 2011).

Another practice is visit restriction. Some self-exclusion programs, such as those offered in casinos in Sweden, offer visit limitation as a program option. Casinos in Holland, which track the number and frequency of visits of all casino visitors, will approach visitors it believes may be at risk of having problems based on their visiting habits. All visitors must have an identification card that they present to security in order to enter the casino. A particular level of visitor frequency signals to security to approach the patron and conduct an interview asking patrons questions to determine gambling’s affordability to them (e.g., income, number of dependents), followed by discussing the use of measures to reduce the number of visits such as an admission ban or visit restriction. After visits are reduced or restricted, a return interview is conducted and visit frequency is further monitored. Lastly, a patron must also undergo a follow-up interview after they resume their venue visits.

v. Provide information on help services or actual referral to other resources

Gaming staff may also approach patrons to provide them with information on available help services or with actual referrals to such services. These services include community counselling services, as well as information on the helpline, responsible gaming resource centers, and internet resources. Québec was the only jurisdiction that had a gaming venue with an on-site counsellor available to patrons. Knowledge of these resources or where to get information on these resources is common for frontline staff, particularly among those who can directly interact with patrons who they believe may have gambling problems. For those venues that have on-site responsible gaming centres, it is common policy for staff to promote patron use of the centre by either educating patrons about the centre or actually directing them there.

¹ Retrieved February 28, 2012 from <http://www.playscan.com/pages/product#.TQzvqcgcQo>

2. Follow-up and Documentation

After gaming staff responds to a patron about whom they are concerned, there can be a more formal system in place for recording the outcome and communicating this information when necessary.

In the hospitality industry, quality customer care and service, as well as staff health and productivity, involves collecting, monitoring, and evaluating information on staff–customer interactions and their outcomes (Lockwood, 1994). Such a system can help to improve a gaming venue’s customer care for patrons for whom they have concerns, as well as increase staff morale and skills in handling these types of situations.

Several jurisdictions have formal documentation systems in place to record staff interactions with patrons who may have gambling problems. The Atlantic Lottery operates gaming venues in Prince Edward Island that have a system in place for specially designated staff to record “incident reports,” as well as patron self-exclusion information (e.g., registration, reinstatement, breach). This information is stored in the security drive, which is accessible to designated personnel.

In Ontario, all incidents in which OLG gaming venue staff respond to a patron exhibiting some type of distress or red flag behaviour (e.g., sleeping, problem gambling disclosure) are documented in its RG interaction database. After an interaction, staff complete a form that includes information such as the staff involved, their behaviours, and the outcomes of the interaction (e.g., patron directed to the RGIC), which is then input into the RG database. Specific information that identifies the patrons, however, is not logged in this database so that these patrons remain anonymous. In 2011, the OLG began tracking interactions. This data is used to inform OLG RG player education programs, staff training, and reinforcement and understanding of red flags.

Having records of specific patrons and any interactions available to staff can help staff better assess patron risk levels and appropriate actions. Delfabbro et al. (2011) examined the accuracy of gaming staff’s recognition of gambling problems among customers and found that they tended to underestimate problem gambling risk levels. The researchers suggest this may be due to gaming staff only having “snapshots” of the patron since their multiple job duties frequently prevent them from being able to monitor them over an extended period of time. One way to combat staff’s inability to assess patrons is to document any potential problem gambling-related behaviours of the patron—including patron–staff interactions—into a data system for staff to use. This repository of information enables staff to put the patron’s behaviour into a larger context and produce a more complete and accurate assessment of their risk level. Having a broader description of a patron’s behaviour also enables staff to formulate a more appropriate response.

SaskGaming’s iCare program also chronicles all staff–patron interactions and this information is available to all RG Specialists and select senior management. The program also monitors the individual gambling levels of the patrons involved in the interactions. By combining these two types of information, venue management can evaluate the effectiveness of the staff’s response to the patrons by determining any changes in the patron’s subsequent play after their encounter with the staff. In addition, monitoring these events is valuable for identifying what responses have worked and not worked when assisting the patron (Davies, 2007).

3. Involuntary Exclusion

Another practice, albeit extremely rare, is to ban the patron from the property. Hing (2005) reported evidence from the perspective of players who believe that staff should be identifying and banning gamblers with problems. Because this can be a potentially volatile situation, some jurisdictions have policies in place to reduce the chances of patron harm. Gaming staff in Nova Scotia and Ontario must ensure that patrons have a safe way home while staff in British Columbia must first ensure that the patron is safe to go home.

After being pioneered in 1998 by BetSafe, an RG program for Australian gaming operators, third-party exclusion services have grown slowly and now exist in several Australian gaming venues and jurisdictions (Australian Capital Territory and South Australia). Successful exclusions require a meeting with the requestor to present their reasons for the request as well as any supporting evidence or documentation that suggests the gambler has incurred financial difficulties from their gambling (e.g., financial records). According to figures from Betsafe, third-party exclusions are relatively rare. Since 1998, Betsafe clubs received a total of 165 third-party complaints, of which twenty-seven resulted in third-party exclusion.

Involuntary exclusion orders are used more frequently in Singapore where casinos exclude patrons for several reasons such as leaving children unattended, begging in the venue, or selling their possessions in order to pay for gambling. Persona Non-Grata orders (PNGs) are issued by the casino security staff. They are almost always linked to a specific incident to which security responds. The PNGs can vary in length though they are typically in place for one year.

Third-party initiated involuntary exclusion in Canada is extremely rare since exclusion must usually be initiated and completed by the patron themselves. However, in addition to offering help and education materials, SaskGaming documents third-party concerns in their iCare system. The information stored may be used for an involuntary exclusion decision. Involuntary exclusion may occur if the Exclusion Review Committee decides there has been a continued increase in red flag behaviours following the presentation of a written letter of concern to the patron, coupled with other documented interactions indicative of problematic gambling behaviour, and may include third-party concerns initiated by friends and family members of a patron.

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

A gaming venue that systematically responds to patrons exhibiting potential signs of a gambling problem tends to be supported by a policy and administrative context that includes clear policies and directions for staff roles, responsibilities, and training.

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

Frontline employees in a gaming venue are usually first to observe or contact patrons who may be having problems in the venue; and therefore, it is important to have broader organizational policies and practices that supports frontline staff in responding effectively to such patrons.

Keeping frontline staff informed about a patron about whom they have concerns allows them to understand the impact of their efforts on their customers, which is critical for improving their skills and ability in this area (Lockwood, 1994). This feedback enhances staff confidence and attitude when assisting or considering assisting a patron (Henning, 2009). Research has shown that some gaming venue employees lack the confidence to approach patrons who show signs of a gambling problem, feeling unsure about how to initiate an interaction, and whether it is their place to do so or not (Hing & Nuske, 2011). Without feedback on their efforts, an employee will remain unsure about the appropriateness and effectiveness of their assistance (see Hancock, 2010), which can be particularly stressing if the staff member has developed a relationship with the patron.

A commonly cited barrier to employee morale, employee job satisfaction, and overall customer care provision is poor internal communication. Good internal communication fosters trust and credibility among staff and customers (Wan, 2010; Argenti & Forman, 2004; Lockwood, 2007; Madlock, 2008-+). Communicating the outcome of a staff member's assistance for a patron for whom they have concerns can clarify the purpose and role of the employee in initiating help towards a troubled gambler, which builds staff pride and job satisfaction and ultimately helps improve the gaming venue's customer service and loyalty.

In general, there do not seem to be any policies and procedures in the Canadian jurisdictions to provide feedback to frontline staff. In British Columbia and Manitoba, however, while there is no system of documentation of incidents of staff-patron interactions, senior staff is encouraged to provide feedback to the frontline staff who brought the patron to their attention (e.g., how they responded to the patron, what happened to patron etc.).

a. Decision-making processes to ensure right response is taken by the right staff member

Related to clearly defined roles and responsibilities is a process of decision-making to ensure the right action is taken by the right staff member. Most jurisdictional policies and practices explicitly outline specific steps each level of staff (e.g., level 1–3) must take to fulfill their specific responsibilities when responding to a situation where a patron may have gambling problems. In Manitoba, role-specific skills are taught to staff when

handling situations where a patron is in distress, requests information, or discloses they have a gambling problem. Staff members have a formulaic chart matrix that outlines different situations and the specific steps that each level or type of employee should take in responding.

Generally, the jurisdictions had less clear processes and policies in place to guide staff when responding to suspicions as opposed to incidents.

Overall, for senior staff who generally tend to have a more involved role in interactions, jurisdictions had guidelines and steps that are to be followed. Here again, clarity of action is much greater when it involves requests for assistance or self-exclusion and disruptive incidents. Processes of decision-making and management of individuals who appear to have gambling problems, but who do not create incidents, are much less clear.

b. Appropriate RG Staff training

Appropriate staff training is essential to increase staff confidence and lessen uncertainty in responding to patrons who may have problems. There is research to indicate that gaming staff training programs aimed at helping staff assist customers who may be experiencing problems due to their gambling can be effective. For instance, Smitheringale (2001) conducted an evaluation of the Manitoba gambling customer assistance program, which focused on educating in such areas as general problem gambling, visible problem gambling warning signs, how gambling works, strategies to reduce gambling-related harm, how to talk to gamblers, and community-based resources. The training program resulted in a better staff understanding of how gambling works, the signs of problem gambling, as well as an increase in knowledge and skills relating to providing assistance to those with gambling problems.

Clearly defined staff responsibilities and roles and structures for decision making are essential. For example, although there may be policies that clearly delineate a staff member's role, they must be supported by staff training in order for those policies to be properly carried out. The training programs examined have several common characteristics that are important to training staff to respond to patrons who may have problems. While the quality and depth of the specific characteristics may vary between programs, most, if not all the jurisdictions reviewed, had the following characteristics to some extent.

i. General knowledge and awareness of problem gambling

All provinces, with the exception of one, have training programs for gaming venues that explicitly provide general education about problem gambling (e.g., general definition or description, consequences). This content is mainly to increase awareness as well as provide information for staff when responding to general inquiries from patrons.

ii. Problem gambling indicators

This area of training furthers the general knowledge and awareness of problem gambling to include specific indicators of problem gambling both inside and outside the venue. Those that occur inside are more relevant to staff for identifying patrons in the venue with potential gambling problems. Most jurisdictions provide a general list of signs or red flag behaviours that a staff member may observe:

Saskatchewan:

- Discusses personal concerns
- Shows concern about losses and payouts
- Accuses casino of changing payouts or rigging machines
- Exhibits signs of distress: crying, swearing, hitting machines or table
- Gambles for an extended period of time (three or more hours)
- Is in the casino frequently

- Doesn't take a break
- Changes gambling patterns
- Gambles alone while ignoring other interactions
- Withdraws cash frequently

Alberta:

- Change in behaviours— frustration, agitation
- Frequent trips to ATM/cash call
- Longer or more frequent playing session
- Playing several machines or requesting to a open high-limit table
- Repeatedly commenting about losing or about family problems
- Myth playing— using rituals or systems, showing obsession with machine or dealing staff
- Showing signs of emotional distress
- Verbally abusing staff or other patrons

Manitoba:

- Striking table or machines in frustration
- Making verbal remarks that may indicate serious overspending
- Swearing at staff or machines
- Withdrawing cash frequently
- Crying
- Trying to borrow money
- Family members looking for patron
- Complaining about machine payouts or making comments that indicate a customer may misunderstand the nature of casino gambling
- Indicating they need a break from the gambling experience or from the casino

Nova Scotia:

- Excessive hours of play
- Early arrival or late night play
- Always around or hanging out when not playing
- No apparent budget
- Escalating sums of money
- Exaggerates wins and minimizes losses
- Thinks they can control outcome
- Believes myths
- Overtly depressed or zoned out
- Mood swings
- Compulsive behaviour or rituals
- Guilty or remorseful

Ontario:

- Threatens property, staff, or other customers
- Is crying, aggressive, or angry
- Plays for extended amounts of time and shows signs of exhaustion
- Sleeping
- Discloses problem gambling
- Comments about myths
- Comments about overspending or losses

iii. How gambling works (e.g., probability, randomness)

Another common area of staff training is to educate staff on how gambling works, including concepts such as probabilities, randomness, odds of winning, and house edge. This information is useful for staff in responding to patrons who express a lack of knowledge in this area. Educating staff about the availability of additional information resources (e.g., brochures, RGIC) is a common component of this training.

iv. Safer gambling

Although less common, some jurisdictions train staff on how to give patrons general advice or tips on how to gamble safer (e.g., set limits, take breaks)

v. RG resources

This involves training on available problem and responsible gambling resources including gaming venue literature, specially designated RG staff, RG centres, websites, and community resources (e.g., helpline, counselling).

vi. Approaching and interacting with patrons with problems

This area of training goes beyond answering patron inquiries, and trains staff on how to approach and interact with patrons who are not explicitly seeking assistance. This training content is usually differentiated by level of staff. Since frontline staff are generally discouraged or forbidden to approach patrons with problems, they are trained to report such patrons to senior staff or some other designated person. Frontline staff, however, can be trained to respond to patrons who approach them for general inquiries, questions about problem gambling or how games work, or for assistance. Senior staff tends to undergo a more detailed and expansive training program because of the wider responsibilities and implications associated with interacting with patrons. This level of training can involve various scenarios where a patron is exhibiting concerns and identifying the appropriate approach in response to each situation. This includes:

- Assessing the situation (e.g., What is the behaviour causing concern? Is an interaction required?).
- Planning the interaction (e.g., informing other staff as necessary, taking the patron to a private area).
- Using the correct approach (e.g., respectful, non-judgmental, compassionate).
- Determining how to start the conversation (e.g., Is everything okay? How is your day? Is there anything I can do for you?).
- Providing appropriate resources and guidance (Complaints about payouts may involve providing clear and simple information on the probabilities of the game with take away materials; complaints about losses may be an opportunity to encourage patron to set a budget and offer

more detailed information about available resources; visible signs of distress requires listening to the patron to establish the problem, techniques to de-escalate emotions, offering support and information, and making sure that the patron is safe to go home).

vii. Mandatory training

All the jurisdictions had mandatory training programs and staff usually completed them at the time of hiring or within the first few months of employment.

viii. Refresher courses

There is sufficient research to suggest that programs that train gaming staff on how to identify and assist patrons with potential problems should be given on a regular and continuous basis (e.g., Dufour et al., 2010; Giroux et al., 2008). For instance, in an evaluation of a staff training program that sought to educate VLT venue employees about gamblers with problems and how to help them (i.e., “Taking Risks is No Game”), the results showed that the training session improved employees’ attitudes towards gamblers with problems, increased employees’ knowledge about how and when to help, and that employees exhibited behavioural changes shortly after training (Dufour et al., 2010). However, these behavioural changes were not fully maintained at the eight-month follow-up as those who participated in the training program did not approach a patron with gambling-related problems any more often than those who did not complete the training. The absence of a longer term effect of staff training on gaming venue staff’s behaviour has also been reported for a casino venue staff training program (Giroux et al., 2008). These findings suggest that training programs should include strategies to maintain long-term effects, such as including continual periodic refresher courses.

Most of the staff training programs reviewed tended to be one-time events, however there are a few exceptions. For example, in January 2012, the Atlantic Lottery introduced a Social Responsibility Certification Program for all employees. RG is a significant component of the program and all employees are required to re-certify every two years. For the casino staff, this is in addition to the venue training that they receive upon hire. The OLG uses a needs assessment and gap-analysis based approach to determine training needs. Some gaming venues also had periodic responsible gaming centre information sessions for regular gaming venue staff, although attendance appeared to be voluntary.

3. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

Resources specializing in responsible or problem gambling-related information and services can play an important role in helping a gaming venue address patrons who may have problems in the venue.

a. Specially designated gaming venue RG staff

The most salient of RG resources is the Responsible Gaming Centre, which is typically a stand-alone, self-contained area that is accessible to gaming venue staff and patrons. It offers problem and RG education; resource and referral services, including print literature (e.g., brochures), videos (e.g., how games work); and interactive education programs. It may be staffed or unstaffed and is usually open twenty-four hours per day, although staffing is often restricted to select hours. In a similar but less comprehensive vein, some jurisdictions (e.g., Saskatchewan, Quebec) have a specially designated gaming staff member who is responsible for RG services (e.g., RG Specialist, Vigilance Committee Investigator).

In most Canadian jurisdictions, gaming staff are educated about the presence of the Responsible Gaming Centre or officer, and are trained to raise patron awareness of the centre as a resource for problem gambling and RG information. It is fairly common for gaming staff to refer patrons requesting such information to the centre. In some jurisdictions such as Alberta, there is great emphasis on referring patrons to the centre for any kind of responsible or problem-gambling inquiry as soon as possible. Once at the centre or meeting the RG officer, patrons can obtain the appropriate information, consultation, and referrals.

In most gaming jurisdictions, RG officers do not have the authority to approach or interact with patrons on the gaming floor who are demonstrating signs of a potential gambling problem. There are exceptions: in Saskatchewan, for example, where SaskGaming's casinos have their own RG staff, the RG Specialist identifies a person with a potential gambling problem—either through the iCare system, referral, or observation of red flag gambling behaviours—and approaches them. At the Atlantic Lottery, the RG staff are able to offer assistance, information, and resources as required to patrons on the gaming floor. For those gaming venues with separately staffed centres, the centre staff tend to only speak to patrons who approach them or the centre for help. In Manitoba and British Columbia, where gaming venues have separately staffed centres, RG staff do have the authority, along with other level 3 gaming staff, to initiate interactions with patrons who have are suspected of having gambling problems. In most other jurisdictions, RG staff are used to support gaming staff with challenging interactions and assist with self-exclusion enrollment.

b. Self-exclusion program

Self-exclusion is another service, which is closely tied to responsible gaming centres in some jurisdictions. While gaming venue staff are responsible for registering patrons in the program, many jurisdictions now have responsible gaming centre staff involved in the self-exclusion education and enrolment process (e.g., British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario). These individuals have the training to handle these often highly sensitive and emotional situations. At SaskGaming casinos, the RG Specialists facilitate the entire self-exclusion process from enrollment to referral.²

² It should be noted that the RG Specialists at SaskGaming are considered as part of Security.

SUMMARY

- Several jurisdictions have formal programs to identify patrons with problems in their gaming venues. These programs are based on a list of red flag behaviours, or observable physical behaviours, inside the venue that indicate a patron may have a problem (e.g., visit frequency, hitting the machine).
- One of the more recent developments in problem gambling identification in gaming venues is the monitoring and assessing of the actual play behaviour of patrons.
- In Canada, most jurisdictions respond to third-party requests for assistance with a friend or family member by offering help resources to the concerned party such as information on problem gambling, a helpline number, and contact information for local counselling services.
- When frontline gaming staff believes a patron may have a gambling problem, the most common and often only response in all of the Canadian jurisdictions was to “report up” or escalate the situation to another person who is trained to address the situation more directly.
- Policies and training regarding staff responses to incidents and overt requests for assistance are much clearer than those addressing suspicion based on observed behaviours
- Approaching a patron who may have problems requires a non-judgmental and non-confrontational approach with a heightened sensitivity to and respect of the patron’s privacy.
- Some jurisdictions have documentation systems that establish files on patrons and record patron–staff interactions or incidents, as well as self-exclusion information.
- A repository of patron information that documents patron–staff interactions enables staff to put the patron’s behaviour into a larger context and produce a more complete and accurate assessment of their risk level and formulate an appropriate response.
- Keeping frontline staff informed about the outcome regarding a patron for whom they have initiated some type of response allows staff to understand the impact of their efforts. Feedback is also helpful in improving staff skills and ability as well as building staff pride and job satisfaction.
- Since many frontline gaming staff can be very uncertain about their roles and ability to handle a situation where they feel a patron has a problem with their gambling, it is important to be able to provide employees with a clear understanding of their expected job responsibilities and actions that are monitored and rewarded by management.
- Appropriate staff training is critical to increasing staff confidence and effectiveness in responding to patrons who may have problems with their gambling.
- On-site RG Resource Centres or specially designated venue RG staff that provide responsible or problem gambling-related information and services to both patrons and staff can be very helpful in assisting with situations suspected of having problems with their gambling.

Background

Casino managers and supervisory employees were interviewed for their views on responding to patrons who are exhibiting behaviours of concern.

The project funding organizations provided a list of gaming staff ranging in positions from RG information staff, to slots or table managers, to floor shift managers, to customer service supervisors, to security supervisors, or to directors. Employees were contacted and asked if they would be interested in being interviewed for the project. In total, 41 gaming employees were interviewed from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan. Interviews took approximately one hour and were conducted from August 22 to September 9, 2011 and from January 9 to 13, 2012.

Interviewees were asked a series of questions in relation to the following topics: staff background, patron behaviours, responses to patrons, and staff training and documentation (see Appendix B for the question list).

Discussion of Findings

The content of the interviews is organized according to the three key areas identified in the literature review and practice. The findings presented are an amalgam of all the interviews and represent common and recurring points.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

Gaming staff were asked to describe the procedures or steps that are taken in the following scenarios: a patron directly requesting assistance, a patron exhibiting signs of gambling problem or potential problem, and a third party indicating a patron may have a gambling problem. Each of these is discussed below.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

When presented with the scenario, “a patron approaches a floor staff and says they have a gambling problem,” all interviewees reported that frontline staff is expected to escalate the interaction to a supervisor who would then decide to contact either a responsible gaming staff person or security staff. The patron is taken off the gaming floor to a private room to discuss their concerns and to be provided with information about resources (e.g., treatment, debt counselling, Gamblers Anonymous, etc.) and, if necessary, self-exclusion. If the patron decides to self-exclude, security is responsible for enrolment in the self-exclusion program.

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem but Does not Request Assistance

Gaming staff were asked “have you or your staff ever observed behaviours or other signs that a patron might be having problems with their gambling?” The most common behaviours or signs reported were:

- Chasing losses,
- Increased time and money spent on gambling,
- Exceeding set money or time limits,
- Drastic changes in betting patterns (e.g., playing higher denomination slots or tables),
- Borrowing money from other gamblers,

- Frequent trips to the ATMs, and
- Not taking breaks during extended play.

Gaming staff were also asked if patrons exhibit other behaviours of concern other than gambling related. Other behaviours of concern reported by interviewees included:

- Poor health and physical appearance,
- Mood changes (e.g., from enjoyment to irritability, to desperation, to fatigue),
- Emotional outbursts (e.g., crying, frustration),
- Irrational thinking,
- Physical interactions with machines (i.e. hitting, pushing buttons heavily),
- Alcohol consumption,
- Absence from work or family activities to gamble, and
- Family members looking for patrons at gaming venue.

When presented with the scenario, “a patron approaches a floor staff and makes an indirect comment that could indicate that they are having problems with their gambling (for example, spent their rent money on gambling),” all interviewees reported that the immediate response is for the floor staff to escalate the situation to the supervisor or RG staff. This in turn may lead to a conversation to determine the extent of the problem. Interviewees noted that a similar procedure is taken when a floor staff member notices changes in a patron’s behaviour and demeanour, and the staff suspects the patron may be having problems with their gambling. Frontline staff is expected to express their concerns to the supervisor, RG staff, or security. The patron is observed for any red flag behaviour prior to engaging the patron in a casual conversation. Many interviewees stressed that gambling related information could only be provided if the patron explicitly makes a comment about their gambling.

When asked, “how often have you seen patrons with signs of a potential gambling problem?” frequency differed by the size of the gaming venue. Gaming staff working in large casinos were more likely to come across these behaviours several times a day. For those in smaller casinos, it was less frequent. For the most part, interviewees would consider patrons exhibiting these signs to be “regulars.” Gaming staff were asked, “what, if any, impact does seeing a patron who may have a problem with their gambling have on you?” Interviewees were generally not personally impacted by seeing a patron who may have problem with their gambling. Some interviewees reported that it has affected their staff. Some noted it is frustrating to not be able to offer help unless the patron asks for it. They also found it difficult to offer gambling related information and education to patrons who do not want to listen. Interviewees also reported that stress due to feeling guilty that a patron had lost significant amounts of money was common among newly hired staff.

3. Third Party Indicates A Patron has A Gambling Problem

Gaming staff were given the scenario of a patron’s family or friend approaching a floor staff with concerns about a patron’s gambling. All interviewees reported that frontline staff is expected to contact their supervisor. The supervisor would give the family member or friend relevant information and direct them to the responsible gaming centre for more information about available resources. In few jurisdictions, it was common practice to have information packages specifically for family members and friends that include a booklet explaining gambling, ways to talk to a person they are concerned about as well as support resources. All interviewees emphasized that a patron will not be excluded from the gaming venue due to a third-party request. Self-exclusion has to be voluntary.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

1. Monitoring and Interactions

Gaming staff were asked if the gaming venue monitors patrons over time when patrons show signs of a gambling problem.

The majority of interviewees reported that there are no monitoring procedures in place for instances when a patron is showing potential signs of a gambling problem. Various reasons were offered, including supervisory staff or responsible gaming representatives engaging with the patron in the moment and a lack of clear communication procedures to continually monitor and notify supervisory staff over time.

Some interviewees noted that they monitor patrons exhibiting signs of a problem, and that this monitoring may occur over the short-term or long-term. Short-term monitoring is limited to the amount of time a patron is in the gaming venue. With this type of monitoring, patrons are observed during their stay. These observations are not documented, but are verbally communicated, and action is taken within the time the patron is in the gaming venue. Patrons would not be monitored at each subsequent visit over time. The situations in which short-term monitoring would occur are when a patron:

- Visits the venue several times a day,
- Does not take any breaks during long periods of play,
- Exhibits signs of fatigue while playing,
- Displays emotional outbursts with indirect comments, and
- Shows changes in behaviour during play, such as increasing bets.

Long-term monitoring refers to the documentation of observations and interactions with a patron exhibiting signs of a gambling problem over time (e.g., weeks, months, years). This is quite uncommon. Only two Canadian jurisdictions have the systems in place to support staff in monitoring patrons over time. SaskGaming uses the iCare system to monitor patrons and is used to coordinate the interaction process among the RG Specialists. Monitoring is a result of a patron being identified by the iCare system as being high risk or having multiple referrals and interactions with RG Specialists. To initiate the process, a patron may be identified as being high risk by the iCare system or may be referred to the RG Specialist who would make contact with the patron, give them problem gambling or RG information, and document the interaction. If the RG Specialist felt that the patron's gambling was still a concern they would put that patron on watch status in the iCare software program with further instructions for other RG Specialists. Several interactions with the patron and continued concerns would lead to a case study and referral to the Manager of Responsible Gaming for follow-up and action.

Québec uses a monitoring database that is linked to all four casinos in the province. Patrons are monitored as a result of showing visual signs of a gambling problem or approaching staff for help. Once the file is opened, it is updated with any observations or interactions that staff have with that patron over time. An analysis of a patron's gaming activity could result in a staff approaching a patron to discuss their gambling. Files are closed when the patron's behaviour has changed positively or if it is deemed that the patron does not have a gambling problem.

Gaming staff were asked, "do you think there are situations where gaming staff should talk to a patron about their gambling?" The majority of interviewees did not think there was any reason for a floor staff to speak to a patron about their gambling. Rather, they felt that this should be directed to a supervisor or an RG representative. In fact, the majority reported that floor staff employees are instructed to not initiate contact with patrons unless the patron has approached them for assistance. Some interviewees felt that in cases where a frontline staff has developed a relationship with the patron it would be acceptable, although this is not encouraged. Other interviewees reported that it would be difficult for the frontline staff to approach a patron due to their job duties (for example, table attendants are stationed for thirty minutes on and fifteen minutes off).

Generally, gaming staff reported providing the following information to patrons when having an interaction related to gambling:

- How the games work,
- Gambling myths,
- Tips to keep gambling at low risk, and
- Help resources in the community and gaming venue.

To support the information discussed with a patron, interviewees stressed the importance of presenting players with take-away materials so that they could reflect at a later time.

When asked, “what would you consider success when responding to situations where a patron has a problem with gambling?” the majority of interviewees felt that success was relative to the patron’s willingness to get help. For many interviewees, success included educating the player about the games, the patron being responsive to the information given and requests more resources (such as counselling), player makes changes to their play (i.e. set limits); and player enrolls in self-exclusion program.

The critical factors that played a part in achieving success were:

- Ensuring patron is away from the gaming floor or at least the game they are playing,
- Being non-judgmental and listening to the patron,
- Being respectful, sensitive and empathetic to the patron,
- Being trained on how to respond to patrons, and
- Being knowledgeable about the resources available to patrons.

Some of the challenges in responding to situations where a patron is having problems with their gambling include:

- Staff are not comfortable addressing patrons that show signs of a problem,
- Player resistance (e.g., does not want to listen, does not want to admit to a problem),
- Not enough promotion of gaming venue resources (e.g., RGIC, self-exclusion program),
- Few options for private interactions with patrons (e.g., office spaces), and
- Language barriers.

Other less noted challenges that were mentioned include: stigma attached to the responsible gaming centre, patron unwilling to tell the truth, and the inability to know the patron’s financial background.

Gaming staff were also asked about the safeguards that need to be in place to ensure the protection of patron privacy and autonomy when having direct interactions with patrons. Many interviewees mentioned:

- Having a private area where staff could speak with patrons,
- Conversations being held off the gaming floor or away from where patrons are playing,
- Respecting the patrons wishes,
- Employees being trained on confidentiality (e.g., no one speaks of details of interactions with patrons at any time),
- Limiting access to and password protecting databases that document patron interactions (e.g., only security, management, or RG representatives to access databases), and
- Off-site options for self-exclusion.

2. Follow-up and Documentation

Gaming staff were asked to describe how observations or interactions with a patron with a potential gambling problem are documented. Few interviewees reported having specialized systems in place to document observations. Most interviewees reported that there is no documentation of problem gambling-related observations; rather observations are verbally communicated to supervisory staff on-shift and at shift changes.

In the event of an interaction, the majority of interviewees noted that there was some documentation. Generally, interactions were recorded by department (e.g., security, managers or Responsible Gaming Centre) in their own interaction logs or through emails. There was a clear distinction between the types of interactions recorded by security or managers versus those recorded by the Responsible Gaming Centre. For instance, security and shift reports only recorded serious incidents (such as disruptive behaviour, threat of self-harm, theft, or vandalism) whereas the Responsible Gaming Centre reports were centered on problem and responsible gambling information provision.

The level of detail recorded varies greatly depending on the type of documentation system available to gaming staff. Minimal documentation includes a basic interaction description including the problem and resolution with no personal details. An example of this is Ontario's reporting tool that allows gaming staff to report details of patron interactions that result from the staff responding to observed red flag behaviour. In-depth documentation provides a detailed interaction description, patron demographics, details of materials given, patron picture, and play behaviour such as SaskGaming's iCare system and Quebec's database.

According to those interviewed, documented interactions are not used to make decisions. Many of the interviewees reported that there were no policies in place to use documentation for decision-making or on what basis the documentation should be reviewed by supervisory or executive staff. Some interviewees suggested that at the very least it could be used by to develop staff training scenarios to better equip gaming venue staff in responding to patrons.

When asked, "what type of systems to collect and document information are needed to report observations and interactions," most interviewees suggested a province-wide database. These databases would have the capability to document multiple interactions with the same patron, the ability to run reports, and allow for follow-up and referral documentation.

3. Involuntary Exclusion

When asked, "are there any situations where a patron should be involuntary excluded because of their level of gambling problems?" many felt that it would only happen in situations where a patron was being belligerent or violent, where the underlying cause could be gambling problems, but this would be a trespass ban rather than exclusion and it's a short amount of time (e.g., one to ninety days). However, depending on the severity of the situation, the length of trespass ban could be indefinite. The majority of interviewees did not feel that there are any instances where patrons should be involuntarily excluded due to a suspicion of a potential gambling problem. The main reason behind this was that they felt it is difficult to differentiate between the warning signs caused by gambling and stress caused by other factors such as family or work issues.

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

Most of the interviewees were aware of the policies and procedures related to responding to patrons who are exhibiting behaviours indicative of a gambling problem. In general, frontline staff are trained to immediately refer a patron to supervisory staff or RG staff for an interaction. Rarely is the frontline staff providing the patron with information.

Gaming staff were asked, “are there any circumstances or situations when policies or procedures are not followed?” The majority of interviewees were not aware of any circumstances or situations where venue set policies and procedures were not followed by staff. A few interviewees noted situations that could impede protocol: staff not being comfortable dealing with patron concerns, the gaming floor being short-staffed, the staff not providing adequate information, the staff does not having enough time to attend to the patron, and the patron not being receptive.

When it comes to staff training on problem and responsible gambling, all interviewees noted that frontline staff and senior staff receive different training. Frontline staff are trained on the signs of a gambling problem, help resources available in the community and gaming venue, when to escalate a situation to senior staff, and how to communicate with patrons when directly approached. Certain senior staff receive additional training on how to approach patrons, what to say and what not to say, crisis intervention, and self-exclusion process participation.

Gaming staff were asked, “what advance preparation should gaming staff have when approaching a patron who has a gambling problem?” Many interviewees felt that when approaching a patron, all staff, especially frontline staff, should have a clear understanding of their role and how to respond to situations (e.g., when to escalate, what to say to patrons) as well as the resources available to patrons. Many interviewees stressed that staff should have a clear understanding of the signs of a gambling problem but be aware that the common warning signs are not a definitive list. Some interviewees noted that frontline staff must have a clear understanding of the responsible gaming centre’s role and services in order to properly assist patrons. Interviewees were also asked to identify specific practices and skills that are important for gaming staff to have in approaching and assisting patrons who might have a gambling problem. The most common practices and skills were:

- Listening (i.e., understanding what the patron is saying),
- Speaking tactfully (i.e., speaking to patrons with dignity),
- Displaying compassion and empathy (i.e., being sensitive to the issue),
- Showing respect,
- Being observant,
- Showing support (i.e., showing patrons that they are genuinely concerned with their well-being),
- Being informative (i.e., knowledge of available resources and protocols),
- Having a willingness to interact at that level with a patron, and
- Having confidence in reporting observation to supervisor or manager.

Many interviewees mentioned that they would like to see refresher training on identifying the signs of a gambling problem. For many, staff training is only a one-time occurrence and is often forgotten especially when staff are not faced with those situations on a day-to-day basis. Some interviewees suggested discussing one problem or responsible gambling issue at every shift meeting to keep it fresh in staff minds or having the responsible gaming representative offer presentations on potential scenarios based on staff experiences.

When asked, “if a venue staff member escalates a situation where they believe a patron has a gambling problem, does that staff person receive information of the outcome of that escalation?” almost all interviewees reported that the frontline staff that refers the patron to a supervisor, generally does not receive feedback on the outcome of the escalation. Many interviewees noted that there is no official policy to provide feedback; it is at the discretion of supervisory staff. Additional reasons for lack of feedback include patron privacy protection, confidentiality agreements, and feedback requests being rare. Only a few of those interviewed practiced employee feedback and provided the employee with enough information to close the feedback loop.

All interviewees felt that providing staff with feedback is valuable but should have limits. They felt that as long as the feedback is constructive and consistent with venue set policies and procedures, it was important to close the loop. Interviewees stressed that it is important to ensure that the feedback does not infringe on patron privacy. Many interviewees supported providing feedback, stating that it would encourage staff to continue to assist and provide help if they knew that their assistance was doing something positive and beneficial for the patron.

2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

When asked, “what role might onsite information centres play in the management of responding to patrons with signs of a potential gambling problem” the majority of interviewees felt that the Centres played a significant role. Interviewees emphasized the educational role of the Centre for both staff and patrons on how the games work and the resources available for help with a gambling problem.

In some jurisdictions, responsible gaming staff are allowed on the gaming floor. Some interviewees reported that this is beneficial to minimize the stigma that patrons associate with speaking with someone about problem or responsible gambling concerns. Interviewees also noted that this helps to build relationships with gaming venue floor staff and management. Some interviewees commented that they would like the centre to be staffed more hours in order to be of greater benefit to gaming staff and patrons.

SUMMARY

In summary, the following key points emerged from the interviews with gaming employees:

- While all staff receive problem and responsible gambling training, many felt it is important to reinforce the information with refresher training.
- It is important for frontline staff to have a clear understanding of their role when it comes to responding to situations (e.g., when to escalate, what to say to patron, resources available).
- Frontline staff are expected to escalate an interaction to their supervisor when: a patron has disclosed they have a gambling problem and patron makes an indirect comment or shows signs of a potential gambling problem.
- When frontline staff are approached by a third party indicating a patron has a gambling problem, frontline staff are to redirect them to their supervisor or RGIC.
- The majority of interviewees did not feel that there are any instances where patrons should be involuntarily excluded due to a suspicion of a gambling problem.
- Staff faces several challenges when responding to situation where a patron is having problems with their gambling. They include but are not limited to inability to approach players, discomfort with addressing the issue, and there being few options for private interactions.
- Staff view the responsible gaming centre as a valuable resource in helping to assist with patrons showing signs of a potential gambling problem.
- There is a lack of specialized systems in place (such as databases) to document observations and interactions with patrons showing signs of gambling problems over time.
- Staff suggested implementing specialized documentation systems that are either casino or province wide with the capability to record multiple interactions, run reports, and allow for follow-up documentation.
- There was support for providing frontline staff with feedback on the outcome of an escalation that resulted from their observations.

Background

Focus groups with problem gamblers were conducted to explore what types of interactions they have had with gaming venue staff, and to find effective ways for staff to approach and engage with patrons exhibiting behaviours of concern.

Focus group participants were recruited through Pinewood Health Centre. A treatment provider conducted the focus groups between October and November 2011 with the first focus group being a pilot test for finalizing the focus group discussion guide questions. In total, three focus groups were held, consisting of thirty-four gamblers overall. All three groups were held in Ontario. Please see Appendix C for focus group questions.

All of the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. All participants signed consent forms and all transcripts and recordings are stored on the RGC secure computer network.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are organized according to the three key areas identified in the reviewed literature and practice. This discussion is an amalgam of the feedback from all of the focus groups and presents common and recurring points and themes.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

Focus group participants were asked to identify any situations where gaming staff should definitely talk to a patron about their gambling. All participants agreed that there are situations when a gaming staff should speak to a patron about their gambling. The most common situations that were identified included:

- Gambling for long periods in the venue without a break (e.g., six straight hours or more),
- Disturbing other players (e.g., asking for money),
- Displaying aggressive behaviour towards machines, other patrons, or staff,
- Falling asleep at the machine or staggering from lack of sleep, or
- A family member presenting evidence that the patron is having gambling problems.

Participants were then presented with the following three situations and asked if they thought gaming staff should talk to the patron about their gambling in each instance.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

When given the scenario of a patron telling a gaming staff that they have a gambling problem, all participants agreed that gaming staff should take action in this situation as “it is a call for help.” Participants suggested that staff actions not be limited to only information provision but also include “[having] a counsellor be brought to the patron,” or “taking the patron to someone who has been specially trained” to assist patrons.

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem but Does not Request Assistance

To begin the discussion, participants were asked, “what are some signs that a patron who is having problems with their gambling may show at the gaming venue?” Across all groups, participants noted the following signs:

- Increasing frequency of visits to gaming venue,
- Increasing duration in gaming venue,
- Escalating bet amounts,
- Increasing speed of play,
- Repeatedly withdrawing cash,
- Exceeding money and time limits,
- Displaying signs of aggression towards machines, other gamblers, or staff,
- Requesting increases to credit card or bank withdrawal limits,
- Falling asleep at the slot machine, and
- Avoiding interaction with anyone around.

Some of the more uncommon signs included bringing own food and eating at the machines, begging for money from recent jackpot winners, scrapping for any change and taking it to cashier, redeeming comps for money, and winning but not being happy about it.

Participants were then asked, “have you ever shown signs that you were having problems with your gambling while at the gaming venue?” The majority of participants noted regularly showing signs of a problem while gambling at a gaming venue. The frequency of showing signs increased while losing and once they had developed severe gambling problems. Participants said

“I can remember sitting there exhausted, bleary-eyed but pounding the button with definite determination every time.”

“When I had a big win, I didn’t show any big excitement or anything. I just thought to myself there is nothing to get excited about.”

“I’ve fallen asleep and I haven’t been thrown out after spending 36 or 48 hours there.”

“[I would make] trips to the bank machine and being zoned out like having tunnel vision, not really being aware of my surroundings.”

“I had to fight with a person at [a credit card company] to get another \$1,000 that night.”

A few participants felt that they did not always show signs of a gambling problem, especially when they were winning. One participant said, “there would be good nights. On nights when I was actually winning, I would show less signs.” Another participant said, “I wouldn’t say that the signs would be shown every time, it depends on why you are there. When I went for a girl’s night out, it was more entertainment.”

Participants were asked, “do you think that gaming staff were aware that you were having problems with your gambling?” Almost all participants felt that gaming venue staff was aware that they were having problems with their gambling, saying that “[staff] recognize you. They acknowledge how long you have been there or whether you have been away.”

Some participants noted that staff awareness is more prominent in a smaller venue since there is more opportunity for staff to engage in conversation with patrons. As one participant said, “especially in a small casino, you are a daily visitor and you know all of them by name.” Another participant added, “they are there

half the time talking to you and spending time with you. They come back a few hours later and say 'oh are you still here?'"

A few participants felt that staff awareness would have been low as a result of their particular play behaviour or demeanour. Participants felt that there was a need to be a "good loser" and leave the venue with their "head up high." Participants also stated:

"No, the casino didn't know because my gambling was spread out throughout the province and interprovincial, unless they were paying attention to the card."

"In my case, I was a nomadic traveler. I could have been anywhere in the province, anywhere my work took me."

"I think that I put on a good front. I didn't let on that I was having a problem. I didn't let on that I was losing lots of money. I just put on this face and nobody thought I had a problem."

"I would hide the signs. I know it's bad because no one can get a real read on things, but you leave smiling no matter what."

Participants were given the situation of a patron approaching a gaming staff and making an indirect comment that could indicate that they are having problems with their gambling (for example, spending rent money on gambling). The majority of participants felt that this was "an opportunity to approach" or "an open door." Overall, participants felt that this would be a good opportunity to discuss gambling, provide information, or direct them towards someone more qualified.

A similar scenario was presented to participants where a floor staff member notices significant changes in a patron's behaviour (increased play) and demeanour (unhappy, anxious), and suspects that they are having a problem with their gambling. Participants found this scenario to be particularly sensitive as the patron could be offended. The majority felt that staff should approach the patron but be cautious in doing so. As one participant said, "they should approach with caution because they are not invited," or, "expect a negative result but still approach."

Others felt that staff should not approach, if staff should approach it should be done specially trained staff who are knowledgeable, able to identify problems, and assist. Responses included "this is a place where training needs to come into play. It would be offensive," "this is entering a grey area here. It's not appropriate for all staff on the floor [to approach] but maybe a select few," and "staff needs to know how the gambler feels to be able to identify the good or bad moment to get a receptive and positive reaction." One participant said, "I would like to see it where they would have a certain set of people that are trained specifically for this job. Not just any staff. They know what signs to look for and not to disturb me while I'm playing, but to monitor me and maybe when I'm about to leave they can approach me." A few participants felt that if there were to be specially trained staff "watching" patrons on the gaming floor, these staff should not be gaming venue staff but rather a third-party affiliate.

3. Third Party Indicates A Patron has A Gambling Problem

Participants were presented the situation of a family member arriving at the casino concerned about a patron. There were mixed opinions. Some participants did not feel it was necessary for staff to speak to a patron citing privacy as an issue. One participant felt that "it is a discussion that should be done at home with family." Other participants felt that staff should engage in a casual conversation with the patron. As one participant said, "it's a definitive sign that I have gambling issues and should be talking to somebody whether it's a gambling issue or other issues." Another participant said "I think they should not disregard it, there should be somebody there that could take the [patron] aside and have a word with them." Overall, participants felt that this situation should not be ignored, but rather that it must be monitored. The patron should be observed to see if they are displaying any signs of a gambling problem.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

1. Monitoring and Interactions

Participants emphasized that the gaming venue should be monitoring signs of problem gambling among patrons saying, “if they are showing signs of problem gambling they should be monitored,” and “it would help if the gaming venue would be taking note of some of these signs. [They should be] monitoring if patrons are staggering from lack of sleep, banging on the machines and all those signs of impairment from gambling.” Another participant said, “make note of the interaction with the player— what happened when approached, whether they wanted information.”

Some focus group participants felt that frontline staff were not fully equipped to respond to patrons exhibiting signs of a gambling problem. They stressed that frontline staff must be supported by specially trained staff that are tasked with “watching” patrons on the gaming floor and know how to approach patrons.

When asked for suggestions or guidelines that could make interactions more positive, the majority of participants said to approach in a friendly and casual way. Many participants stressed using the player’s first name and asking, “how are you?” or “are you okay? If you want some help, I’m right here” to initiate the conversation. Overall, participants were very clear that they did not want staff to approach them while they are playing. Rather, almost all participants suggested having the conversation with players away from the games while they are either en route to the ATM or out the door. With this in mind, participants suggested giving the player the option to choose where they would like to have the conversation while keeping it private and discreet.

Others suggested repetition. They felt that maybe with time they would begin to listen, one participant said, “maybe I would not respond the first, second, or third time, even the fiftieth time, but I might respond or get to a point where I knew somebody was there that would understand me and maybe on the 101st time I would respond.”

Some participants suggested sending players gambling information by mail or email. As one participant said, “they could send you information in the mail, like attach a message that way you don’t feel embarrassed and it’s not intrusive. It also gives you something to think about.” Another participant said, “could use email to send problem gambling or responsible gambling information since the majority would have players cards.” Most of the participants felt that the goal of the interaction should be to give the player something to think about.

When participants were asked, “have any of you ever been approached by a gaming staff person about your gambling?” the majority said “no.” One participant said, “I don’t remember ever being approached or commented to by a staff member regarding any issues or problems.” However, there were a few participants that had been approached by staff. Generally, staff had asked if the player needed information, pointed out the helpline number, or asked them to take a break by leaving the casino or slot machine. Responses included:

“One time there was this attendant who said to me ‘did you ever notice that there is a 1–800 number on the machine that you could call?’”

“I had staff, dealers, or wait staff say to me very quietly maybe you should go home or something like that. But they said ‘don’t tell anyone that I’ve said anything to you’.”

“I was approached numerous times. When I started having problems, I got really frustrated. [Staff] had come over and asked me to leave the machine because I was frustrated.”

One participant felt that the comments made by staff about his gambling were “not [made] in a serious way.” The participant added that “at a time when I was approached it was too easy to make it into a joke and that’s where it was always left. There was no force behind the suggestion at all to have considered it more seriously.” Rather it was suggested that staff approach with a more constructive plan of action, for example, “to say, you have a problem we sympathize with you. Here is the 1–800 number, call it tomorrow, that wouldn’t fly. It would have to be, we have these resources and we want you to do this and that. Give me a call within a week to follow-up.”

A few participants thought that staff were hesitant or did not want to approach them when they noticed signs of gambling problems. One participant said, “they see you talking to the machine, hitting the machine, smacking the machine and they don’t say anything or pretend that they didn’t see you doing that.” Another participant said, “I stayed at a casino once for four-and-a-half days without changing my clothes and without leaving and nobody said anything to me.” One participant felt angry that staff did not approach saying, “all of the staff know that the people that are there are doing something that can become problematic. Now that I think back, it makes me angry that they didn’t do anything.”

Participants were asked, “has anyone ever approached a gaming staff person about a potential gambling problem?” The majority had not approached anyone about their problems. There were some that responded affirmatively, saying, “I did more than once,” “I only did that when I hit my lows,” and “only to self-exclude.” Participants felt that once they had directly asked for help, staff was more than willing to provide them with the help information they needed.

There were mixed opinions among participants when asked, “how would you respond to a gaming staff employee who initiated contact with you regarding concerns that they had with your gambling?” Some participants thought that they would be annoyed, upset, or angry, saying, “I would be really ticked. Because I’m there trying to zone out and someone is asking me to leave this safe heaven,” “I would feel annoyed,” and “if I was in the zone, I would be mad as hell.” Other participants felt that “it’s [the venue’s] obligation to approach and if you get angry their staff should be qualified to handle that.”

Some participants felt that their reaction to staff approaching them would be dependent on how they were approached. Many felt that the approach had to be casual, private, and maybe using non-verbal tactics (for example, a business card with information). Participants said, “I think it would be better to use something non-verbal like a business card, a pin or button, even a piece of paper so that one would not be offended,” “it’s all in the way that is it delivered,” and “depending on the approach, if it was right and not making a scene, saying something like ‘You seem a little stressed. Do you want to take a break?’”

Others, however, provided a different view in which they would be happy that someone had approached them and “planted the seed” even though their immediate response may be negative. Participants felt that this gesture could have pushed them closer towards taking action for their problems. Responses included:

“I don’t think I would listen to them to while I’m there. But it might spark a thought for afterwards on my way home.”

“I would take offence at first, but at a later point I would reflect on it.”

“The fact that someone has made an attempt to help you- that speaks volumes. If you choose not to accept the help that’s okay, but at least they’ve done the responsible thing, that is to initiate.”

“I would like to think that if I didn’t respond positively at the moment, perhaps that person gave me something to think about later. You know, when you are doing the walk of shame, it would then register.”

“I feel that if there had been somebody saying that to me a couple of times, I would have done something.”

“It gives you food for thought. It’s all up to the individual how they take it and what they do with it. Whether you dismiss it or give an inkling of thought. If I had been aware and had some idea, maybe I wouldn’t have gone to the extreme.”

2. Follow-up and Documentation

Focus group participants were not asked about casino record keeping or staff involvement and feedback.

3. Involuntary Exclusion

Participants were asked, “are there any situations where a patron should be involuntarily excluded because of problems with their gambling?”

For the most part, almost all participants agreed that patrons who are violent and aggressive towards other patrons, staff, or the gaming venue (e.g., destroying property) should be excluded involuntarily. When it came to other types of behaviours, some participants felt that visit frequency, excessive amount of time, previous self-exclusion experience with repeated signs of problems, ATM visit frequency, impairment due to sleep deprivation, and asking other players for money should cause exclusion. Responses included:

“Yes, if you are there six times a week, sleeping in vehicles, and falling asleep at the machine.”

“Asking random strangers for money.”

“Well someone who has been to the ATMs four, five, six times, continuously withdrawing money and losing and hours go by and they are still doing it.”

“Maybe if that person has self-excluded before, once, twice even three times and been reinstated each time and the problem signs are back upon reinstatement.”

“Excessive amount of time being there, like twenty-four hours or more.”

Almost all participants agreed that an involuntary exclusion should have a staged approach, whereby a patron would receive warnings prior to exclusion. As one participant said, “there should be a stepped approach to forced exclusion. First, have a verbal warning, then a letter and lastly show them out the door.”

A few participants felt that a gaming venue has the responsibility to involuntarily exclude a patron with gambling problems. They associated the accountability of staff in liquor-licensed establishments with gambling staff, saying, “it’s like at the bar, they have the responsibility to say ‘I think you’ve had enough,’ and there is no difference with gambling,” “at a bar, they kick you out if you’ve had too much,” and “it makes me very angry that no one is intervening and people leave the casinos impaired.”

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

Overwhelmingly, participants stressed that the gaming venues should develop a policy stating that staff will be monitoring patrons and that staff will approach should there be signs of a gambling problem. By doing so, participants felt that they would be more responsive to having staff approach them. Responses included:

“I think that if they had a sign saying that if we notice that you are having a problem we may approach you and let you know about it. If you are aware of the fact ahead of time that they may do that, I think it would go a long way towards keeping someone from being upset.”

“If there was a policy [I think] that would make me feel better about someone approaching me and it would make me take it more seriously too.”

“If that’s the rule then you have to follow that rule. If you are in a venue where that was the rule, then you are going in at your own risk knowing that they will approach you.”

“Maybe when someone signs up for a players card, they can be told of the policy and ask if we notice signs if it is okay to approach you. That way the patron decides beforehand and it’s a way to respect their freedom of choice.”

They added that the staff should identify a target group of players that they would like to approach, for instance, “those that have been there playing for x number of continuous hours.”

When asked, “what specific practices and skills are important for gaming staff in approaching and assisting patrons who might have a gambling problem?” participants were quick to respond with suggestions. These included:

- Being respectful, courteous, and empathetic;
- Being knowledgeable about gambling problems and available help resources;
- Being discreet, tactful, and non-judgmental;
- Being trained on communication skills, crisis intervention, and listening; and
- Being able to speak multiple languages.

Participants also mentioned that staff should receive thorough training on the signs of a gambling problem and the steps to take when approaching patrons who are exhibiting signs of a gambling problem.

2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

Focus group participants were asked if they had ever approached responsible gaming staff with any gambling concerns. While almost all participants were familiar with the locations of the centres, the majority of participants had not approached any staff. A few participants said that they purposely waited until the centre was not staffed to get information.

SUMMARY

In summary, the following key points emerged from the focus groups:

- The majority of participants had regularly shown signs of a gambling problem while gambling at a gaming venue.
- Despite showing signs of a gambling problem, participants had not been approached by staff while gambling at a gaming venue.
- Participants felt that staff is hesitant to approach when noticing signs of a gambling problem.
- Participants felt that gaming staff should take action when a patron requests assistance with a gambling problem.
- Participants felt that specially trained staff who are knowledgeable, able to identify problems, and able to assist should approach patrons exhibiting signs of a gambling problem.
- Participants emphasized the need for gaming venues to monitor patrons showing signs of a gambling problem.
- Participants suggested discreetly approaching players away from the gaming floor (e.g., en route to ATM).
- Participants suggested a staged approach for an involuntary exclusion, whereby a patron would receive warnings prior to exclusion.
- Participants supported a policy that states staff will be monitoring patrons and will approach if there are signs of a gambling problem.

Background

The Expert Forum was held from November 30 to December 2, 2011 in Toronto, Ontario. Attendees consisted of forty-five experts on patron interactions from North America, Europe, and Australia, and included regulators, operators, treatment providers, researchers, and individuals who have sought help for gambling problems. The proceedings of the forum were moderated by a professional facilitator and consisted of presentations, large group discussions, and smaller breakout group discussions.

During the forum, current research and knowledge of best practices in patron interactions were discussed as forum attendees explored the factors that impede and facilitate these interactions. Forum attendees shared ideas on how to enhance the effectiveness of patron interactions in gaming venues.

Forum attendees were asked to discuss a list of eight questions (see Appendix D). Attendees were divided into four breakout discussion groups. Each breakout group had a different focus and each group discussed two or three of the eight questions. Each breakout group chose a presenter that would review the points of discussion from the group to the rest of the forum attendees. The professional facilitator then engaged the group in a discussion on each of the breakout group topics. Discussion from the larger group and presentations are included where relevant.

Participants were grouped into the following breakout groups:

1. The venue policies and support group was asked to develop the model policy for assisting patrons with gambling problems, address how interactions are to be documented, and address whether staff should receive recognition for their role in assisting patrons.
2. The red flags group was tasked with identifying the warning signs (obvious and less obvious behaviours) of gamblers with problems in the gaming venue.
3. The planning and managing interactions group was to identify the steps that need to be taken when responding to a patron who says they have a problem, exhibits signs, or makes indirect comments of a gambling problem, as well as the steps needed to respond to third-party requests.
4. The involuntary exclusion group discussed the feasibility and implications of excluding a patron based on gambling problems.

Discussion of Findings

The following presentation of the discussion is organized according to three key sections that constitute the framework for gaming providers to respond to patrons with potential gambling problems.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

The forum opened with a presentation on “Assisting Patrons in the Gaming Venue” (Hing, 2011) that identified three types of interactions where gaming venue staff are to respond to patrons: (1) patron directly requests assistance; (2) patron exhibits signs of a gambling problem; and (3) third-party requests. Among the findings presented, it was found that staff is generally reactive rather than proactive when responding to patrons. These three types of interactions were discussed in the gambler’s panel, breakout groups, and as a large group. The findings for each type of situation are discussed below.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

A direct request for assistance is when a patron approaches a gaming venue floor staff and states that they have a gambling problem. The planning and managing breakout group felt that the patron should be taken off the gaming floor and referred to the Responsible Gaming Centre or to a staff member that is appropriately trained to respond to these situations. They felt that the goal of this type of interaction is to present the patron with options available to them at the gaming venue and within their community. One group member said that prior to presenting options and information, patrons must be given the opportunity to talk about their situation as this would provide insight on the type of help that they are looking for or willing to access. While there was debate on the type of information that should be offered to patrons, group members cautioned that it is ultimately up to the patron to decide on which course of action to take.

In the large group discussion, forum attendees felt that if a patron requested assistance, the frontline staff must escalate to the appropriate supervisory level staff or the Responsible Gaming Centre. This would ensure that the patron receives the attention and information necessary to help them address their gambling problem. The gambler panel members strongly stressed that this type of interaction is a cry for help and should always be taken seriously. Patrons should be taken to a private area and treated respectfully.

Overall, these viewpoints were consistent with the presentation findings. Participants felt that patrons must receive an immediate response to their request along with help information such as self-exclusion program options and referrals to the responsible gaming centre, counselling and other community resources. The presentation also pointed out factors that can affect a gaming venue's response to patrons:

- Staff knowledge of procedures and materials,
- Staff confidence,
- Patron discomfort,
- Familiarity with patron,
- Emotional involvement or detachment,
- Staff experience, and
- Size of venue.

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem or Potential Problem but Does not Request Assistance

The presentation on "Assisting Patrons in the Gaming Venue" pointed out that floor staff are able to identify signs of a gambling problem on the gaming floor. Forum attendees were quick to point out some observable and obvious signs of a gambling problem. The red flags breakout group identified overt and implicit signs under the following categories:

Extreme and Negative Behaviour

- Abusing staff
- Ignoring or not responding to staff and others
- Displaying emotional distress (e.g., looking angry)
- Showing agitation
- Not eating or drinking, just staying in the gaming venue
- Borrowing money
- Waiting for "their" machine when it is occupied
- Falling asleep at the machine

- Not smiling or looking happy
- Going to the casino alone more and more frequently
- Having domestic disputes in the gaming venue
- Not showing a change of emotion on the wins and losses

Ritual Behaviours

- Rubbing the machine or sitting at the same machine
- Having a routine for going in the casino— arriving at the same time and walking through the same areas
- Consuming food they brought in at the machine (so they don't have to leave)
- Having lucky charms or wearing particular colour or clothing item
- Using reserved signs and taking them home for the next visit

Irrational Beliefs and betting patterns

- Extending play duration
- Increasing visit frequency
- Spending more and increasing wagers
- Taking frequent trips to the ATM
- Complaining about machines (e.g., myths)
- Looking for patterns trying to find a system (e.g., tracking numbers)
- Reinvesting wins
- Waiting at the ATM until after midnight
- Chasing losses
- Acknowledging wins but never losses
- Making moves to attract attention during play (e.g., purposely losing hands on table games)
- Changing betting patterns
- Continual breaching of VSE
- Playing multiple machines at once

Lack of care and awareness of self and others

- Receiving cell phone calls and going somewhere to hide and talk on the phone
- Requesting not to tell a spouse that an employee saw them there earlier that day or on a specific day
- Hiding from RG staff
- Abandoning loved ones to gamble
- Neglecting self-care and personal hygiene

Cry for help

- Asking several questions, saying the information is for "their friend"
- Spouse calling in to ask if the casino can exclude their husband or wife
- Casually visiting to the RG Centre
- A third party expressing concerns

Breakout group members felt that a patron who exhibits multiple signs of a gambling problem requires a more urgent response. In the larger discussion, forum attendees added the signs need to be looked at in context of other factors and a response is warranted once the behaviour has escalated over time.

While Hing's (2011) presentation showed that staff is aware of the signs of the gambling problem, it also revealed that staff feel handcuffed, mainly due to uncertainty of when they should intervene, if at all. This scenario received a more in-depth look by the planning and managing group and in the larger forum session. There was a general consensus that if frontline staff is concerned about a patron's gambling, they must report their concerns to a supervisor or manager. One participant suggested providing staff with reminder cards of how best respond to various situations. The card would identify the steps that frontline staff would take to respond to a particular instance (e.g., player increasing frequency and duration).

After receiving concerns about a patron from frontline staff, the supervisor or manager should further observe the patron for a period of time to ensure that the concerns are justified and the initial response is appropriate. It was clear to the group that when approaching the patron it had to be in a non-threatening manner, beginning with an initial intention to engage the patron in a casual conversation. The conversation would prompt the supervisor to either provide information to reduce the risk of gambling problems or to contact responsible gaming or security staff for a more private conversation.

Overall, forum participants agreed that the goal of this type of interaction is to reduce risk through self-awareness and education. This type of information would include setting limits, creating a gambling budget, dispelling myths, and information on available helping services.

3. Third Party Indicates a Patron has A Gambling Problem

Situations where a third party indicated that a patron has a gambling problem were widely debated among the breakout groups and during the large forum discussion. Participants made it clear that in such instances frontline staff must refer the third party to a supervisor or RG representative who would provide them with information and resources to help the patron and themselves. While it is not widely available across all gaming jurisdictions, there are a few jurisdictions where staff had information packages available specifically for third-party requests. One participant presented the example of SaskGaming, where RG Specialists engage with the third party to identify the patron and determine the appropriate approach. The specialist then approaches the patron as part of a casual conversation but seeks to determine if the third party's concerns are valid. Based on discussion with the patron, the RG Specialist provides them with help information particular to their needs.

There was discussion about the validity of third-party requests. Some participants cautioned on the potential of ulterior motives fuelling such requests and suggested that gaming venue staff at least observe the patron for a period of time to look for any red flags that would corroborate the allegations. In general, it was felt that third-party requests should require investigation to help confirm and support the third party's claims. In and of themselves, the requests should not warrant directly approaching the patron without further observation nor should it result in an exclusion from the gaming venue. In fact, all participants agreed that the patron must voluntarily request exclusion.

Since there are no general guidelines or procedures for responding to third-party requests across all gaming jurisdictions, participants stressed the need for gaming venues to develop procedures and protocols that clearly outline staff roles and provision of information in this type of situation. This sentiment was echoed by the gamblers panel that stressed the need to provide help to family who may have a significant other with a gambling problem.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

1. Monitoring and Interactions

Forum participants discussed the idea of monitoring patrons displaying signs of a gambling problem as a prerequisite to approaching patrons. There was consensus that patrons should not be approached based on staff observing just one or two red flag behaviours, unless those behaviours were extreme or disruptive (e.g., aggressive behaviour) or the red flags continued or grew over time. This would avoid prematurely labelling a patron as having a problem. Instead, the observance of one or two red flag behaviours should allow the staff to begin a longer-term monitoring process so that staff have a chance to see whether or not the patron displays additional red flag behaviours. However, there was no agreement among forum participants on the length of time necessary for a patron to be monitored.

There was consensus among venue policies and support group members that monitoring patrons for multiple red flag behaviours improves the chances of more accurately identifying patrons with potential gambling problems and that the gaming venue has a responsibility to act in helping to reduce the risks associated with gambling.

Overwhelmingly, all the forum participants felt that frontline staff should escalate concerns about patrons to designated and properly trained supervisory, managerial, or RGIC staff who can then approach a patron and initiate an interaction, if necessary. The presentation on “SaskGaming’s iCare Interaction Process and Case Studies” (Norman, 2011) showed a video of how an RG Specialist approaches a patron who is immersed in their play but appears to be chasing losses. The specialist walks by them a few times tending to matters in the venue (e.g., tidying up) but in clear view of the patron. Eventually, after making some eye contact, the staff casually asks the patron how they are doing, which evolves into a conversation about the games. Forum participants agreed with the need for specially trained staff to approach patrons.

Participants from the gamblers panel stressed that patrons should not be approached while they are playing. Rather, they should be approached away from the gaming floor (e.g., en route to the ATM or exit) and in a private area. Other forum participants also shared this view and further added that any interaction with a patron should be initiated casually and in a non-threatening manner.

The presentation on motivational interviewing (MI) (Hodgins, 2011) described techniques and tools to assist gaming staff with patron interactions. MI is a client-centred method that focuses on the interviewer listening and reflecting, in order to elicit client motivation for change towards a particular goal. A key component of MI is that the client decides for themselves what they should do and how they should go about doing it in order to change some aspect of their situation.

Some forum participants were concerned that since staff–patron interactions are relatively short within the gaming venue, MI might have limited practical value. However, participants felt that the following basic principles could be utilized by staff and incorporated into their interactions with patrons to better respond and assist patrons:

- Asking open ended questions to elicit discussion,
- Using affirmations to convey understanding of what the patron is sharing,
- Using reflective listening to paraphrase what the patron has shared, and
- Summarizing what they have heard from the patron.

Lastly, there was discussion on the lack of recognition of the part that frontline staff play in responding to patrons who may have problems. Forum participants felt that if frontline staff take on a customer-centred role and assist patrons appropriately, they should be recognized for their efforts. Rewarding frontline staff would encourage them to continue to follow procedures and be more attentive to patrons who may be showing signs of a gambling problem.

2. Follow-up and Documentation

The large majority of forum participants felt that interactions with patrons based on staff concerns should be documented. Participants in the venue policies group felt it is important to distinguish an interaction from an incident as they require different protocols. For instance, an interaction may or may not include the supervisor or RG staff member, as well as provision of RG information, whereas an incident (e.g., disorderly conduct) would involve security and the removal of patron from the gaming venue.

Group members agreed that documentation of interactions should include the following information:

- What happened?
- Who was present or involved?
- What was done (e.g., type of information provided)?
- What needs to be done in the future?

Participants identified the current complications involved with communicating interactions to other staff. Having a database system that allows for the documentation and communication of staff–patron interactions available to selected staff (e.g., shift managers) was recognized as a potential remedy to this problem. However, the existence of such a database also raises privacy concerns because staff will have access to sensitive information. Some participants recommended that since security is generally privy to all patron information, especially with regards to incidents, they could be given access to patron interactions. Other participants suggested employing a confidentiality agreement that could be signed by select frontline staff and management to have access to information about patron interactions.

3. Involuntary Exclusion

Forum participants debated involuntary exclusion for patrons who may have gambling problems. There was considerable concern that such a measure should not be used on the basis of suspicion of a gambling problem. It should only be used in those situations where there is clear and ample evidence of an actual gambling problem. Some suggested a ban may remove the gambler from a network of helping services which is linked to the gaming provider. Lastly, exclusion does not prevent patrons from gambling in other ways not affected by the exclusion.

A few participants argued that an involuntary exclusion would be no different than banning someone for violent conduct in the gaming venue. Since gaming venues are private institutions, they have the power to enforce a ban when they see a patron's escalating red flag behaviour. Instead of seeing the ban as punitive, participants felt that it would send a message to the patron and serve as a break from gambling. Participants suggested that the venue could display a sign stating that it has the power to ban and when they can ban (e.g., patron is acting in certain ways).

Despite mixed opinions, there was some agreement among forum participants that involuntary exclusion is an acceptable option in certain scenarios. The involuntary exclusion group identified four scenarios where a patron may be potentially involuntarily excluded from the gaming venue. They include:

1. Repeat violation of self-exclusion agreement,
2. Observation of multiple and escalating red flags,
3. Patron falling asleep at the gaming venue, and
4. Third-party backed ban (for example, a request from a family member) cross-referenced with patron exhibiting red flag behaviour.

In terms of the length of the involuntary exclusion, there was consensus among the involuntary exclusion group that at minimum there must be a twenty-four-hour ban from the gaming venue. Ban length would vary based on the graduated and progressive response of the gaming venue to a particular situation. Participants agreed that there should be several interactions in which information or resources have been offered, before a ban should be contemplated.

The group also discussed the process of re-entry after a ban. They suggested that a procedure should be in place that clearly states a patron must meet with a designated person prior to re-entry (such as an RG representative or a specialized third party) and show evidence of an attempt to improve their behaviour.

Participants also discussed the legal implications surrounding an involuntary exclusion. Many felt that gaming venues can legally impose an involuntary exclusion on a patron who has demonstrated signs of a gambling problem. Indeed, some felt that if the gaming venue knows a patron has a gambling problem, not responding exposes the venue to a legal liability. On the other hand, others felt that implementing involuntary exclusion is complicated by the practical issues surrounding implementation (e.g., consistency across all sites, staff training, documentation, political will).

Overall, participants cautioned that involuntary exclusion must be looked at on an individual basis and is dependent on the patron's particular circumstances. Forum participants were quick to point out that irrespective of length, the ban may not solve the patron's gambling problem and must be supported by information and community resources.

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

Forum participants felt that policy development should take a full customer service approach that is centered on the patron's well-being. Participants stressed that assisting patrons with problems has to be part of the gaming venue's culture and part of all staff's responsibilities. This may require changing existing organizational cultures to represent the new expectations of staff with regards to assisting patrons.

In line with assisting patrons, some participants suggested having dedicated customer liaison officers on the floor—people who roam the gaming floor to respond to patrons since frontline staff have little time to address patrons. Adding this role could minimize the anxiety of other frontline staff in engaging in sensitive interactions with patrons. Some participants specifically noted those gaming venues where RG staff roam the gaming floor and work together with supervisors to assist patrons and facilitate the connection to community resources (such as self-exclusion and counselling). Other suggestions for a model policy included situating RG as part of everyone's job, having defined roles and responsibilities for all positions on how to respond to patrons, considering a role for dedicated personnel to specialize in RG interactions, staff training to be provided by specialized staff, and providing frontline staff with reminder cards on how to best respond.

Forum participants identified a lack of confidence among staff in responding to patrons who may have gambling problems as a challenge in responding appropriately to such patrons. Participants stressed that staff need to be properly trained and, in fact, should receive mandatory RG and problem gambling training irrespective of their position in the gaming venue.

There was consensus that staff training should provide information on how staff should respond to patrons in various situations and clearly identify their roles, responsibilities, and steps on how to respond. Participants suggested giving staff step-by-step guidance on what to do in various scenarios. For instance, if staff observe certain behaviours they should be aware of the necessary steps to be taken immediately (e.g., if they a patron displaying emotional distress and increasing their spending, staff should then report the observations to their supervisor). Participants also suggested having refresher courses for staff.

Overall, participants felt that effective training will make staff accountable and recognize that assisting patrons who may have problems is part of their job.

Forum participants in the breakout groups discussed the need for staff to be aware of the gaming venue's policies on responding and interacting with patrons. Similarly, they also felt that patrons should be aware of the gaming venue's policy to observe and follow-up with patrons exhibiting red flag behaviour. This awareness implicitly provides consent to offset any privacy issues should the patron be observed or followed-up with. Participants from the gamblers panel suggested having signs that communicate this policy to patrons upon entering the gaming venue. One member of the venue policies breakout group recommended that the sign read, "We care about you and we will be watching for certain behaviour. If you are exhibiting these behaviours, we will check-in with you while you are here." With this sign, patrons would not be surprised if a gaming venue staff member approached them to discuss their behaviour.

The forum group also discussed the benefits of providing frontline staff with feedback on the outcome of a patron interaction. While participants were sensitive to the privacy concerns that patrons may have with the gaming venue sharing their information with others, they felt that feedback could help to motivate frontline staff to assist patrons and give them a greater sense of workplace satisfaction. Thus, if feedback is given, it should be minimal in terms of expressing personal details of the outcome but enough to let frontline staff know that their concerns were heard.

2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

Forum participants identified that RG staff are an underutilized resource for gaming venues in responding to patrons with potential concerns with their gambling. This is mainly due to the inability of RG staff to be on the gaming floor in some jurisdictions. In these cases, staff is primarily focused on prevention through information provision and as occasional support for staff when needed. Overall, participants suggested increasing involvement of responsible gaming centre staff, and where available, to assist with patron interactions.

SUMMARY

In summary, the following key points emerged from the forum breakout groups:

- Patrons should be notified of gaming venue policies on monitoring patrons exhibiting signs of a gambling problem.
- Staff should be trained on how to respond to patrons experiencing gambling problems.
- When presented with a situation involving a patron who may have gambling problems frontline staff should escalate the situation to a supervisor/manager.
- Patrons exhibiting signs of a gambling problem should be first monitored for a period of time to determine the extent of the problem with greater certainty.
- All interactions with a patron exhibiting behaviours of a gambling problem should be documented in a database to which certain staff have access.
- Staff who respond to patrons with gambling problems should be recognized for their action.
- Involuntary exclusion may be an option for responding to certain situations (e.g., repeat violation of self-exclusion agreement) involving patrons who may have gambling problems but overall, should be used very selectively.
- Involuntary bans should be based on an actual and documented problem not merely on suspicion.

Overview

Some patrons of gaming venues exhibit signs that they may have gambling problems. These patrons present a significant challenge to gaming providers. Gaming venue staff members are often conflicted about what to do when they see patrons who may have problems. They are often sympathetic. They want to work in an entertainment setting and do not like to see people get themselves into trouble. They are, however, reluctant to take action which may involve a delicate situation and which may not be approved by their managers. Staff members are often uncertain about their responsibilities in these cases.

Yet, gaming venue staff can play a critical role in responding to patrons, often regulars, they suspect may have gambling problems. Focus group participants in this review and gaming staff both support making improvements to the way gaming venues respond to patrons who are demonstrating potential signs of a gambling problem. Patrons are appreciative when they believe staff care about their well-being.

Yet, there are many pitfalls and potential issues to address in designing appropriate ways to manage these situations. The most significant barrier identified in this review is the lack of clarity around the varying roles and responsibilities of gaming staff. With this comes a lack of confidence on how to deal with individuals who are exhibiting signs of trouble. Typically, unless a patron specifically approaches a venue staff with a concern, no action is taken. In these circumstances, however, staff members are better prepared to respond to their needs.

This review identified numerous ways in which the process for responding to patrons suspected of gambling problems can be enhanced for the greater benefit of the patrons and the venues themselves. Clearly it is much better to address a suspected problem before that problem becomes fully blown. But the benefits reach beyond the individual with the gambling problem. Gaming staff tend to have a higher level of job satisfaction if they are working in an environment that they believe lives up to its own values and cares about its customers. Other customers benefit as well. A gambler with a full-blown problem can poison the gaming floor by begging for money, harassing staff, disturbing other patrons, and using up excessive amounts of staff time. Identifying and responding appropriately to signs of a problem presents an opportunity to interrupt the progression to more serious consequences.

There is no denying that the issues and challenges inherent in responding to patrons with potential gambling problems are many. First and foremost, a suspicion is not a fact until carefully assessed and verified. Most focus group participants supported being approached by trained venue staff about their gambling as long as it was carefully and competently managed. At the same time, many acknowledged that they might resent the attention in the short term. There was unanimity in the belief among the gamblers, however, that it is always better to do something rather than nothing.

Through the review process it became clear that although there may be some debate about the best means of tackling the issue, there is a shared interest in wanting to find better ways to respond to patrons with potential gambling problems. The review participants also provided considerable insight into the way these processes work now and how to improve those processes. Many saw assistance to these customers as simply an extension of good customer service.

I. PATHWAYS TO CONCERN: WAYS GAMING STAFF COME TO BELIEVE A PATRON MAY HAVE A GAMBLING PROBLEM

There are three main situations in which the gaming venue can become aware that a patron may have a gambling problem: (1) The patron may disclose a problem or request assistance of some kind, (2) the patron may show signs that are red flags (either through incidents or certain behaviours, and (3) a third party may approach the venue staff. Each of these situations presents a unique set of dynamics and requires a tailored response.

1. Patron Requests Assistance

The results of both the focus groups and venue staff interviews suggest that direct requests for assistance are relatively rare. When a patron finally finds the courage to approach a venue staff person, they are likely experiencing a range of emotions. The response of the gaming staff is critical.

In this situation, the goal is to provide the patron with options or information specific to their request and to help connect them with an appropriate source of assistance. That means the staff member will be able to identify local problem gambling or credit counselling options, the services available through an onsite RG centre (if there is one), and the essentials of the self-exclusion program. Staff would refer the customer to a supervisor or the other appropriate onsite assistance.

Since a patron may approach any venue employee with a request for assistance, all employees need to be equipped with the training and reinforcement to respond in a confident, knowledgeable, and respectful manner that meets the needs of the patron.

2. Patron Exhibits Signs of A Potential Gambling Problem but Does not Request Assistance

In recent years, much has been learned about red flag behaviours. Most of that learning has been incorporated into venue staff training. In essence, red flags fall into two groups—behaviours (like chasing losses) or incidents (like hitting a machine).

The review found strong agreement that there needs to be clear response to both categories of red flags.

Behaviours

The behaviours category refers to actions by patrons which have been identified through a series of studies and onsite staff observations. Behaviours associated with gambling problems include chasing losses, multiple ATM visits, or escalating betting. These are behaviours that are not necessarily indicative of a problem in isolated cases. But, when observed in patterns and in association with other behaviours or incidents, such behaviours can be an indicator of problem development.

It is important that the behavioural indicators of a potential problem be concrete and clearly delineated. Many signs of a gambling problem are hidden or subject to considerable judgment. Instructions to staff members about non-observable signs only serve to confuse. It is preferable to supply frontline staff with a contained set of observable indicators rather than a long list of subtle ones.

Since gaming venues most often have a large and varied workforce it is very important that instructions to frontline staff be as clear and as straightforward as possible. That means clearly elaborating when to escalate a suspicion and clearly identifying the list of red flags. For example, a suspicion might be defined as a situation in which a patron exhibits one or more red flags on multiple occasions leading the staff person to believe that the patron is showing signs of a gambling problem which is escalating. The reporting of a suspicion will normally require all elements of suspicion—red flags observed on multiple occasions and gambling escalation.

Ten Red Flags Behaviours

1. Gambling significantly or more frequently
2. Chasing losses
3. Neglecting personal grooming
4. Complaining frequently about losing
5. Verbally abusing staff members
6. Gambling continuously for periods longer than six hours
7. Visiting the ATM frequently
8. Family members looking for the patron
9. Displaying signs of exhaustion
10. Complaining about payouts or rigged machines

Perhaps the most effective way to ensure that the signs are always available to staff and that they are reminded to monitor for them is to provide all staff with cards, as is currently done in many venues, listing potential red flags.

Incidents

Incidents are easier to identify. They are more obvious negative actions that often come to the attention of security staff or more senior gaming staff. They usually generate an immediate corporate response.

They include such things as aggression, leaving children unattended, sleeping in the venue, begging or selling goods for money, or obvious displays of acute distress.

Some incidents, like begging for money to continue gambling, will directly reflect a gambling problem. Others are less direct. Sleeping in the venue is a good example of a less direct sign. Sleeping may be related to other stresses such as a medical problem; if sleeping is related to a gambling problem, this is more likely to be revealed through patron conversation with staff members.

The following is a list of incident-related red flags which may be associated with gambling problems:

Eight Red Flags Incidents

1. Leaving children unattended
2. Sleeping in the venue
3. Kicking or striking machines
4. Crying or showing visible agitation or distress
5. Exhibiting angry outbursts
6. Begging for money or selling items for money in order to continue gambling
7. Making threats or showing aggression or violent behaviour
8. Gambling continuously for twenty-four hours

3. Third Party Indicates Patron has A Gambling Problem

The third way that a venue may become aware of a potential gambling problem among one of its patrons is by a friend or family member of the patron approaching the venue staff with concerns. There is no doubt that problem gambling can have devastating impacts on significant others in the gambler's life.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE: STEPS TAKEN TO RESPOND TO A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

The Hallmarks of an Effective Response Framework

In considering an appropriate way to respond to patrons who may have gambling problems, it is essential that gaming providers respond to such situations adhering to a clear set of guiding principles. From the review it is clear that all involved looked for a process incorporating the following principles:

Respect

- Any organizational response to a customer who may have a gambling problem should first carefully assess whether or not a real problem exists, and tailor a response based on that patron's to circumstances.
- Any approach or discussion of a potential problem should be conducted in a non-judgemental manner in a discrete setting.
- Organizations must make customers aware of any organizational processes that monitor play.

Responsive

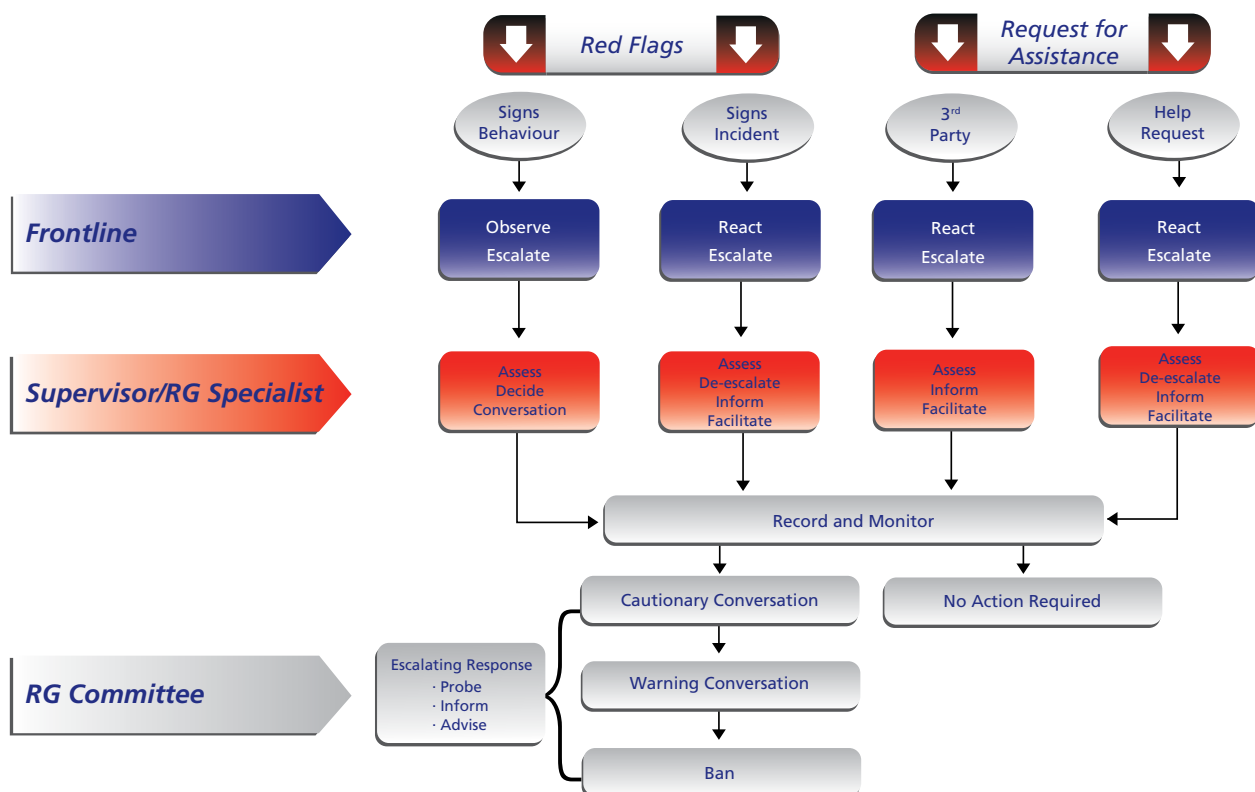
- The organization does not ignore the red flags and sets policies and procedures in place that specify appropriate and planned action by staff.

Systematic

- The organization responds in a systematic way which includes documentation of the action taken and clear protocols for decision making.

Figure 1 depicts the sequence of responses to the signs and incidents that lead venue staff to suspect that a patron may have a problem with gambling.

Response Framework Schematic



Since venue staff may become aware of a potential problem in several pathways, it is important that the response be tailored to the circumstances.

1. Monitoring and Interactions

a. Responding to Patrons Requesting Help

Direct patron requests for help are rare and any staff member may be approached.

Most jurisdictions have processes outlining how to respond to a direct request for assistance. Generally, if a patron approaches a frontline staff member indicating that they have a gambling problem, or that they want to self exclude, the frontline staff is typically expected to escalate the interaction to a supervisor who would then ensure that the request is given to a person with proper training.

When a request for help or a direct disclosure of a gambling problem occurs, staff need to have clear set instructions on how to respond. They need to **react** in a simple, helpful, and direct manner. The staff member should indicate that they understand the request and are able to assist. The staff member should let the individual know that the venue has people available to provide more information. The staff member should then **escalate the request**, and preferably, accompany the patron to the appropriate supervisor or RG Specialist³.

As important as the initial action of frontline staff may be, the actions taken by the supervisor or RG Specialist are critical. The supervisor has four important tasks:

- Assessing the circumstances that generated the request, as well as seeking patron identification and loyalty club information,
- De-escalating the situation if necessary,
- Informing the patron about useful information about sources of assistance and self-exclusion, and
- Facilitating contact with more specialized professionals: both onsite and in the local communities.

It is important that this conversation take place in a discrete and comfortable location out of sight of other patrons.

b. Responding to Patrons Exhibiting Signs of A Gambling Problem

Sometimes staff members will see certain behavioural indicators or incidents that indicate a patron may have a gambling problem. The responses based on the behavioural or incident related signs will require important decisions on the part of staff members. These decisions will vary, depending on whether or not there is an incident involved.

Responding to Incidents

Gaming staff generally have very clear instructions on their responsibilities with regard to a range of incidents. They know how to react and how to escalate. That escalation is usually to a supervisor or security staff. These responders will have protocols in place regarding the management of the situations, including determining the nature of the issue and even de-escalating the issue if necessary. These individuals have a critical role in assessing the situation and determining next steps. If the responder suspects that the incident involves a potential gambling problem then the response should also inform the patron about useful information about sources of assistance and self-exclusion and facilitate contact with more specialized professionals—both onsite and in the local communities.

All incidents should be documented in the appropriate database.

³ RG Specialist refers to an individual specially trained to assist patrons who may have gambling problems. These individuals may be specially trained employees of the venue, sometimes referred to as ambassadors, or staff of onsite responsible gaming centres.

Responding to Behaviours

Many staff members observe red flag behaviours indicative of a gambling problem. More often than not, they are uncertain about what to do with these observations.

Some of the gamblers and gaming staff in the focus groups stressed the need to approach with caution and to be prepared for a negative reaction from the patron. But even among these gamblers, there was support for being approached and potentially planting an idea that will be revisited in either the short-term or long-term.

When a staff member observes behaviours that lead them to suspect a patron may have a gambling problem, their core responsibility is to **escalate** that information to the appropriate supervisor or RG Specialist. In the case of suspicion, the supervisor or RG Specialist has a critical role in assessing evidence and deciding what action is appropriate. That action may involve initiating a conversation with the patron and starting a monitoring process by creating a record in the venue database. If the supervisor believes that information provided is credible, they will need to make their own assessment of the situation. Is there other information? Have they seen the same behaviours? Has other staff expressed concern? Have there been any incidents? Is any other relevant information available in the venue database(s)?

Where the information appears to confirm that there may be a problem, the supervisor should initiate an informal contact with the patron to assess first-hand their state of mind, and to make a record of the suspicion in the organization's player database.

The review found strong support for monitoring patrons demonstrating signs of a potential gambling problem in order to be able to establish whether or not there is an increase in the severity of the warning signs, or an increase in the number of warning signs. That being said, it is important to respect a patron's privacy. In most provinces, unless the patron consents to be monitored—and this is communicated in an explicit way—active monitoring does not take place.

The capacity to record serves three very important functions. First, it provides a base for the future assembly of further evidence to establish if the observed signs are persisting, or if they were simply a temporary lapse. Second, it provides the gaming provider with systematic information on which to make any further decisions. Thirdly, it can be used in combination with other information such as loyalty club data and other play information such as play analytics to create a more complete picture of player behaviours.

If a supervisor believes that the suspicion is substantiated, they have the option at any point in the process to initiate a conversation with the customer to offer informal preventative information and advice. What that patron does with the information is entirely their decision. But many of the gamblers in this review noted that even if it just plants a seed, that seed may be a very important one down the road.

Successful approaches are a blend of science and art and the human element. At the same time, the review did identify common characteristics that were deemed essential in all patron interactions. These included:

- Not interrupting play, if possible,
- Ensuring privacy away from the gaming floor,
- Having a discussion where others cannot overhear,
- Being respectful,
- Using language that is non-confrontational and non-judgmental,
- Being informed about the patron and the circumstances,

- Being trained in dealing with resistance, and
- Providing take away information.

2. Follow-up and Documentation

It is quite possible that a patron could have some difficulties with their gambling and self-correct. They may have a conversation with a staff member and recognize that they are crossing the line. But, what if they don't? What happens if gaming staff and supervisors take the steps noted above and continue to see the same or escalating problems? At that point, the circumstance necessitates greater escalation. It is no longer appropriate to leave the decision-making process to an individual supervisor, but rather has become a corporate issue requiring a corporate response. Where suspicions are confirmed and grow there is a greater need for more than monitoring and conversation. There is a need for a planned organizational response lead by an RG team tasked with addressing patrons whose gambling problems have moved beyond suspicion to reasonable certainty. While they have different names and slightly differing mandates, such vigilance or RG teams are in place in many jurisdictions already. That team should be tasked with monitoring patrons with potential gambling problems and devising interactions appropriate to their circumstances. The team would assemble all relevant data regarding behaviours, incidents, and play history, and consult with knowledgeable venue staff about strategies to manage the customer interaction.

It is essential at this stage that the venue designates arrange a meeting with the patron to note the organization's concern and to provide feedback to the individual about the staff observations. This meeting has several benefits. First and foremost, it can provide clear information to the patron about the venue's concern and promote a change in the patron's gambling. It is also evidence of action by the venue to address the issue in the case where the patron continues to exhibit signs of high-risk gambling.

The team would typically take the following course of action:

- Identify an appropriate individual to meet with the customer to express the concerns of the venue,
- Invite the player to a meeting in a discrete location,
- Convey the concerns of the venue and seek the views of the individual,
- Provide any help information that is appropriate,
- Express continued offer of assistance, and
- Advise that the venue is continuing to monitor the situation.

After subsequent monitoring, if the team believes that the patron is continuing to worsen, the team is likely to need to meet once again to express greater urgency and recommend alternatives such as visit limitations, cessation of loyalty club benefits, self-exclusion, and the potential for involuntary exclusion.

Documentation Systems

At present, there are a variety of customer information tracking systems in place in gaming venues. Some of these systems already have capability to effectively monitor, record, and communicate information related to observing and interacting with patrons. In fact, some are being used for just those purposes.

Having systematic records will help staff better assess patron risk levels and determine appropriate actions. It also rectifies the current snapshot approach by providing staff with a more complete picture of the patron. In the future, with the development of play analytic systems, it will be possible to assemble information from player behaviours and incidents, play history, and play analysis to provide a multi-faceted picture of the player's activities to support any monitoring or actions on the part of the venue.

There are existing technologies, particularly for EGMs and online gambling, that can help operators to identify red flag behaviours associated with play patterns and to monitor unsafe play patterns. Online gaming has an inherent technological infrastructure that allows it to monitor all play activity on the gaming site and to document gambling frequency and play patterns. Similarly, loyalty cards associated with EGMs and other

card-based gambling can monitor a person's gambling activity and allow for a more accurate assessment of gambling frequency, spending, and other behavioural indicators of problem gambling. The implementation of a system to monitor patrons who show signs of a potential gambling problem will be greatly facilitated in gaming operations with capacities to examine actual gambling patterns alongside venue staff observations.

3. Involuntary Exclusions

In practice, there are few situations where a patron is involuntarily excluded for displaying problem gambling signs. The most common situation is when a patron is exhibiting violent or aggressive behaviour. From the data collected for this review, it became clear that there are certain other circumstances in which a patron is clearly gambling in an unsafe way, and would benefit from a more active form of break, either via involuntary exclusion, trespass, or whatever mechanism is available in the particular jurisdiction. It is also clear that such action should not be taken on the basis of a suspicion but rather a well-documented problem that is clearly linked to gambling and that has proven intractable after multiple attempts on the part of the venue. Situations that may eventually lead to a patron being involuntarily excluded would need to be clearly defined. Evidence could include any previous self-exclusion agreements with continued problem gambling signs, observation of multiple and escalating signs that clearly signify a gambling problem, multiple formal meetings with the patron, and a precipitating incident.

Involuntary exclusion would only be used if all other attempts to assist fail to create any positive changes. A clearly defined process with documentation, review, and process would be required to determine the requirements prior to re-entry, such as meeting with a problem gambling specialist.

III. POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT

Moving from a reactive to an active approach in addressing potential gambling related problems in a venue requires aligning expectations and protocols throughout the organization. Responding to patrons with potential gambling problems requires a systematic rather than ad hoc response.

1. Staff Roles, Responsibilities, and Training

Organizational policies set the direction and tone for day-to-day operations. It is therefore important that gaming organizations formulate clear policies to guide staff members in key areas like dealing with the suspicion of gambling problems. At the corporate level, the policies need not be overly detailed but do need to make it clear that the organization has a responsibility to all players, situating RG as part of everyone's job and that that responsibility includes an active strategy to address those who may have gambling problems. The model procedures for responding to patrons with potential gambling-related problems include:

- Having clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all positions,
- Assigning dedicated personnel to specialize in RG interactions,
- Training all staff with refresher courses that are conducted by specialized staff,
- Having a process for documentation and feedback, and
- Having a communication plan that informs patrons of the venue's commitment, policies, and practices.

Gamblers in the focus groups and discussions at the forum highlighted the importance of informing patrons of the venue's practices when it comes to concerns with patrons gambling. They believed that if patrons knew the venue's policies beforehand, they would be much more likely to be receptive to any ensuing conversations regarding their gambling.

Having clearly defined gambling staff roles, responsibilities, and procedures regarding how to best manage situations where a patron either acknowledges a gambling problem or is exhibiting signs of a gambling problem is an important practice guideline.

Currently most policy directives instruct staff to escalate to a supervisor when approached by a patron exhibiting a gambling problem or if the staff member notices red flags. There are clear benefits to providing feedback to those staff who escalate observations of potential problem gambling signs among patrons. Providing the employee with feedback on their observation and actions resulting from that observation provides positive reinforcement.

While it is important that the patron is referred to someone with the appropriate training, there may be situations for the initial staff person to play a greater role in addressing the situation. In some instances, simply reporting up to a supervisor may be counterproductive to the notion of customer care. For example, a patron requesting assistance is much more likely to approach someone they feel a connection to versus a stranger. Since staff often have good relationships with patrons, customer care could be enhanced if the staff person who is the first point of contact could take the lead in providing any information to the customer, or in some cases, even initiate the conversation. Frontline staff may well be the best personnel to play a facilitative role in establishing contact with the most appropriate person to respond to the situation.

The key question is who is to decide the role that any individual staff member will play in a conversation with a patron about their gambling. Clearly that decision cannot be left to the thousands of frontline staff who have varying levels of capability training. Ultimately, though frontline staff members may well be a great resource in discussing gambling concerns with patrons, it is very important that the decision to take any action always be in the hands of supervisors or other RG specialist.

Where a decision is made to allow a staff member to have a conversation with a patron around such sensitive matters, it is very important to ensure that the staff member is equipped with the appropriate information and competencies to undertake this function.

2. Problem and Responsible Gambling Resources

A number of participants in this review noted the importance of providing those patrons involved in any conversation or formal interaction with gaming staff regarding their gambling written material that they could view at a later time.

The review clearly highlighted the importance of having skilled staff conduct interactions. The review also found support for an increased role for responsible gaming centre staff. In most jurisdictions, responsible gaming centre representatives are not allowed to interact with patrons on the gaming floor. Specifically, conversations are limited to special events or when a patron enters the centre. There is an opportunity to make greater use of the skill sets that responsible gaming representatives possess by expanding their role within the gaming venue, and particularly, in patron interactions.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The patron interaction process has been in transition for many years from a 'look the other way' model to an individual response and assistance model. This shift is widely supported by those with gambling problems, gaming operators, and specialists in problem gambling. Improvements to the current ways of responding involve adjustments to most elements of the process—from the way it is promoted to the way it is administered.

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The following gaming jurisdictions provided materials for the stakeholder review:

- Alberta
- Atlantic provinces (New Brunswick, Newfoundland & Labrador, Prince Edward Island)
- British Columbia
- Manitoba
- Ontario
- Quebec
- Nova Scotia
- Saskatchewan

Staff Background Questions

1. What is your current position?
2. How long have you worked in your current position?
3. How long have you worked in the gaming industry?
4. Please describe your main responsibilities.

Patron Behaviours

5. Have you or your staff ever observed behaviours or other signs that a patron might be having problems with their gambling?
 - a. Yes (please describe).
 - b. How often have you seen this?
 - c. How do these situations tend to come to the attention of staff?
 - d. Would you consider these patrons “regulars”?
 - e. Do these patrons exhibit any other behaviours of concern other than gambling-related?
 - f. What, if any, impact does seeing a patron who may have a problem with their gambling have on you, on other staff?

Responses to Patrons

6. Can you describe the procedures or steps that are generally followed in the following situations:
 - a. A patron approaches a floor staff member and says that they have a gambling problem
 - b. A patron approaches a floor staff member and makes an indirect comment that could indicate that they are having problems with their gambling (e.g., spent their rent money on gambling).
 - c. A floor staff notices significant changes in a patron’s behaviour (increased frequency and duration of gambling) and demeanour (unhappy, anxious) and suspects they are having problems with their gambling
 - d. A patron’s friend or significant other approaches a floor staff with concerns about a patron’s gambling
7. Are there circumstances or situations where these procedures are not followed? Describe.
8. Does the venue ever monitor patrons over time if they are showing signs or a gambling problem?
 - a. In what situations would this occur?
 - b. What is the process from start to finish?
 - c. How are these situations documented?
9. What would you consider success when responding to situations where a patron has a problem with gambling?

What are the critical factors in achieving “success”?

10. What are the challenges in responding to situations where a patron is having problems with their gambling?
11. What safeguards need to be in place to ensure the protection of privacy and autonomy of the patron?
12. Do you think there are situations where gaming staff should talk to a patron about their gambling?
 - a. Describe these situations
 - b. Have you seen these situations?
13. Are there situations where a patron should be involuntarily excluded because of their level of gambling problems? Has this ever occurred? Describe.

Training

14. What advance preparation should gaming staff have when approaching a patron who has a gambling problem?
15. What specific practices and skills are important for gaming staff in approaching and assisting patrons who might have a gambling problem?
16. What roles might onsite information centres play in the management of such responses?

Documentation

17. How are staff observations that a patron might be showing signs of a gambling problem documented?
18. How are staff interactions with a patron with a gambling problem documented?
19. Is documentation of staff observations or interactions used to make decisions? How does this occur?
What systems of information collection and documentation need to be in place to report observations and interactions?
20. If a venue staff escalates a situation where the staff believes a patron has a gambling problem, does that staff person receive information of the outcome of that escalation?
Do you think there is value in providing the initial staff person with feedback? Explain.
21. Please provide final thoughts, suggestions, etc.

1. To begin with, what are some signs that a patron who is having problems with their gambling may show at the gaming venue—e.g., casino, racetrack?
2. Have you ever showed signs that you were having problems with your gambling while at a gaming venue? Describe.

Approximately how often did this occur?
3. Do you think that gaming staff were aware that you were having problems with your gambling? Explain.

Have any of you been ever approached by a gaming staff person about your gambling? Describe.

What was your reaction? How did you feel?
4. Has anyone ever approached a gaming staff person about a potential gambling problem?
5. For those who have not been contacted, how would you respond to a gaming staff employee who initiated contact with you regarding concerns that they had with your gambling?
6. Do you think there are situations where gaming staff should definitely talk to a patron about their gambling? Describe.

Let's look at specific situations:
 - i. A patron tells a gaming staff person that they have a gambling problem.
 - ii. A patron approaches a gaming staff person and makes an indirect comment that could indicate that they are having problems with their gambling (e.g., spent rent money on gambling).
 - iii. A floor staff notices significant changes in a patron's behaviour (increased play) and demeanour (unhappy, anxious) and suspects they are having a problem with their gambling
7. If a gaming staff approached you regarding your gambling, what suggestions or guidelines could you offer to make this interaction a more positive one?
8. Are there situations where a patron should be involuntarily excluded because of problems with their gambling? Describe
9. What specific practices and skills are important for gaming staff in approaching and assisting patrons who might have a gambling problem?

Group 1: Venue Policies and Support

1. What would the model policy on responding to patrons with potential gambling problems include?
2. Should there be some form of recognition for venue staff who responds to patrons with potential gambling problems?
3. How should interactions be documented?
 - What is the objective?
 - Who should have access?
 - What information should be recorded?
 - How should it be used?

Group 2: Red Flags

1. Create a list of all potential signs of a gambling problem (obvious and not so obvious).
2. Place each sign on a continuum that would represent the venues response from monitoring to urgent response.



Group 3: Planning and Managing Interactions

1. What should be done in the following scenarios?
 - Who should do what?
 - Who should say what?
 - What is the goal of the interaction?

Scenario #1 – A floor staff notices **significant** changes in a patron's behaviour (increased frequency and duration of play) and demeanour (unhappy, anxious) and suspects they are having problems with their gambling.

Scenario #2 – A patron approaches a floor staff and makes an indirect comment that could indicate that they are having problems with their gambling (for example, spent their rent money on gambling).

Scenario #3 – A patron approaches a floor staff member and tells them that they have a gambling problem.

Scenario #4 – A patron's friend or significant other approaches a venue staff regarding concerns they have with a patron's gambling.

2. What are the critical skills and knowledge staff should have when interacting with patrons?

Group 4: Involuntary Exclusion

1. Are there any circumstances where a patron who is demonstrating signs of a gambling problem should be involuntary excluded (for example, telling a staff person they have a problem five, ten, or twenty times; showing signs of gambling problems after numerous self-exclusions and reinstatements)?

- Describe the situations in detail.
- What would be the length of the exclusion?
- What would be the reinstatement process, if any?
- Are there any legal issues?

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