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# Staging Interventions for Alcohol Use Disorder

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## Introduction

An intervention is a planned meeting with the patient, the family, and usually an addiction professional (an interventionist). The purpose is to confront a patient reluctant to seek treatment with information from family and friends in the hopes of encouraging treatment seeking.

## How It Works

- First there is a pre-intervention meeting among people who are most concerned about the patient—family, friends, an employer, a probation officer, etc. At this meeting, attendees discuss their concerns about the patient, rehearse the statements of concern they intend to make, and schedule the intervention meeting where the patient will be encouraged to engage in treatment.
- The actual intervention is typically a surprise to the patient. At the intervention, people will express their concerns and generally voice an ultimatum that will take effect if the patient refuses treatment. These consequences may include separation, divorce, denial of parental rights, termination of employment, or formal violation of probation, among others.
- The ideal outcome is for the patient to agree to enter treatment immediately, with the interventionist taking them directly to the program from the meeting. The intervention may alternatively aim to get the patient to agree to quit drinking or to enter outpatient treatment.
- Often the interventionist works with one or more residential treatment programs and will get a kickback if the patient enters the program.

## Potential Challenges

- Family members may not feel comfortable with direct confrontation or may not be willing to follow through on the consequences.
- The patient may superficially agree to enter treatment but then renege on that commitment after the meeting.

## What You Can Do

- Help family members find an interventionist. This is typically done by contacting a local addiction treatment facility.
- Be honest with family members about the need for resolute commitment to the ultimatum for an intervention to be successful.

## Bottom Line

In general, we are not big fans of the intervention approach because it is inherently confrontational and requires a sustained level of commitment from family members. It is also hard to find an interventionist who does not have a conflict of interest with a particular residential facility.