AIM Alcohol in Moderation DIGEST ONLINE
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Poor Diet and Lack of Exercise Could Soon Overtake Tobacco As Leading Cause Of Death In US

A growing number of people in Britain believe that a moderate amount of alcohol (in general) is good for their health, according to a survey by the market analysts Mintel. 26% of those questioned said that one of the reasons they drank was because they believed it offered health benefits – this is up from 19% two years ago. Just 9% of the 1000 people surveyed thought alcohol was bad for them, and 20% of men said drinking helped reduce stress and that the social side of drinking was important to their quality of life. The findings offer a glimpse into the psyche of drinkers and shows that the dissemination of scientists research results since the 1980s demonstrating the 'J shaped curve' is increasingly effective. Perhaps if the message can be improved to communicate the importance of patterns of drinking and other lifestyle factors such as diet and exercise we can help improve the startling figures published in JAMA in March stating causes of death in the US in 2000.

The report, with good news for alcohol related deaths, which have fallen from an estimated 100,000 deaths in 1990 to 85,000 in 2000 (3.5% of the actual causes of death in the US) against 435,000 (18% deaths) from tobacco and 400,000 (17% deaths) from poor diet and physical inactivity.

The report opens with the statement 'During the 1990s, substantial lifestyle pattern changes may have led to variations in actual causes of death. Mortality rates from heart disease, stroke and cancer have declined. At the same time behavioural changes have led to an increased prevalence of obesity and diabetes'. The authors Mokdad A.H et al warn that poor diet and physical inactivity may soon overtake tobacco as the leading cause of death in the US.

The number of deaths in 2000 was 2.4 million, an increase of more than 250,000 compared with 1990, due largely to population growth and increasing age. Leading causes of death remain as heart disease (710,760 deaths), malignant neoplasms (553,091 deaths) and cerebrovascular diseases (167,661).

Of the deaths caused by smoking 35,000 deaths are attributable to second hand smoking and 1000 infant deaths due to maternal smoking. The figures related to alcohol consumption are made up of 18,539 reported as alcohol induced and 16,653 from alcohol related crashes. Other alcohol related deaths are linked to oropharyngeal, esophageal, liver, laryngeal and breast cancer as well as to stroke, hypertensive heart disease, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis.

Lesser known and startling causes of death include influenza and pneumonia accounting for 65,313 deaths, scepticemia for 31,224 deaths and tuberculosis for 776 deaths.

Finally car accidents resulted in 43,354 deaths, a decline of nearly 4000 since 1990 with a drop from 22,084 alcohol related crashes to 16,653 deaths in 2000. The authors state 'We included alcohol related deaths to stress that efforts to educate the public and enforce laws against driving while intoxicated have accounted for most of the decline in deaths on the road'. Source JAMA March 10th 2004 Vol. 291 No.10.

The authors conclude that about half of all deaths could be attributed 'to largely preventable behaviours and exposures.' 'Our findings indicate that interventions to prevent and increase cessation of smoking, improve diet, and increase physical activity must become much higher priorities in the public health and health care systems'.

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UK

The long awaited Cabinet Office Alcohol Harm Reduction strategy report was published in March. It focuses on the issues of underage and binge drinking and emphasizes the need for further education programmes that stress sensible drinking and the definition of unit sizes. It is acknowledged that "the majority of people drink sensibly the majority of the time" but that the serious problems of binge drinking had to be eliminated as it was related to many anti -social problems including violence, accidents and disorder.

The successes of some industry efforts are acknowledged but it is highly recommended that more programmess should be initiated. A 'voluntary' sensible drinking guideline back label is suggested as is information on daily drinking guidelines and unit at points of sale.

The report specifically states, "The success of the voluntary approach will be reviewed early in the next parliament. If industry actions are not beginning to make impact in reducing harms, government will assess the case for additional steps…including legislation."

For further information, or to view the report visit www.strategy.gov.uk Corporate subscribers can access the fact sheet on the report and binge drinking via the secure section of the website.

Poland

The current rate of excise on beer, the maximum level permitted by law will remain in Poland despite fears that the country's accession to the EU will encourage cross border shopping.

Polish brewers fear they may lose as much as 20% to 30% of the beer market as the country enters the EU, as Polish taxes on beer are at more than twice the rate paid by their neighbouring German and Czech competition. The ministry did say however that it would monitor the beer market after EU accession on May 1 and said is was prepared to lower the tax, if the market slumps "significantly."(10%)

France

As part of the French government's crackdown on drink-driving, the national road-safety organisation has launched a new service on its website offering drivers the chance to assess their BAC. After logging in data relating to weight, age, size and amount of alcohol consumed, the website comes up with a graph showing when it is safe to drive. Obviously the test is not reliable as a breathalyser but the organisation is confident that the service could help save lives.

Belgium

An Advocate General of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has recommended that bans imposed by France on the broadcast of alcoholic drinks advertising, especially those on hoardings at foreign international sports events, are legal under European law.

Antonio Tizzano has advised the full ECJ to rule that although this does indeed restrict trade, France can legally justify this ban on health grounds.

EU

A significant liberalisation of the rules for the movement of alcohol between EU member states has been made by the European Commission which says the present system is cumbersome and hard to understand.

The new rules will have the effect of abolishing the present "indicative" limits of 10 litres of spirits, 90 litres of wine and 110 litres of beer on which excise duty has been paid in the country of purchase and which are then taken home by the individual purchaser for his or her own use.

For commercial goods, Brussels says excise duty will still be payable in the destination country, but the procedures will be simplified and harmonised by providing for single identification in a central office in each country of destination, where foreign vendors must periodically pay excise duties on the basis of an overall declaration. The changes will benefit citizens and small-scale traders in particular.

Information Leads To Better Judgement AIM US Symposiums

AIM held two symposiums in the US in March, chaired by Peter Duff and hosted by Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in Napa Valley, California, and the International Center for Alcohol Policies in Washington DC. The theme for of the conference was 'Information Leads To Better Judgement'.

Valuable contributions by industry leaders and independent research experts were included. Members of AIM's distinguished Medical and Scientific Council gave presentations. Dr Arthur Klatsky of Kaiser Permanente Medical Center at the California meeting presented a review of the latest scientific and medical evidence and discussed "Should Research Influence Moderation Messages?"

In Washington, Professor R Curtis Ellison outlined emerging scientific and medical evidence supporting responsible drinking and health. Dr Francois Booyse reviewed the US Government's Grant of $7.6 million to study the link between moderate alcohol consumption and lowered risk of heart disease.

Discussions centred on AIM's expanded science, education and social responsibility programme, it was emphasised that science based education initiatives will lead to better consumer judgment and socially responsible decision making.

Speakers and participants agreed that medical and scientific research was of major importance in shaping public and policy opinions about moderation in the US and that the AIM education initiatives via the website are an important tool in bringing balanced messages to decision makers and the consumer.

Specifically it was agreed that the AIM programmes should continue to emphasize the lifestyle and cultural contributions of moderate drinking in line with national guidelines. To this end, AIM will feature fact sheets on sensible and moderate drinking for distribution as part of an expanded education programme.

It was also proposed that AIM should feature expanded scientific discussions and website sections providing information on underage drinking, advertising and related issues. This will include highlighting industry self-regulation and social responsibility programmes in order to counteract some of the misconceptions about the drinks industry and its allied members.

AIM's policy of holding regular conference, symposia and debate will continue. The next meeting is scheduled for October 27th 2004, generously hosted by Waitrose/ John Lewis Partnership in London

For more information on the programmes, email: info@AIM-Digest.com

Some Of Wine's Health Benefits Can Be Publicised By The Industry

A Group of leading international research scientists recently convened in Montpelier during the city's biennial wine show Vinisud, to produce a consensus paper of the health benefits of moderate wine consumption. Under aegis of the European Wine regions' Institute for Wine and Health (IEVSRV) and Professor Serge Renaud, dubbed the "Father of the French Paradox", the scientists came to the conclusion that moderate wine drinking with a meal causes a reduction in cardiovascular mortality. Stressing that epidemiological studies have revealed better protection for wine than for beer or spirits, they recognised the potential influence of environmental factors such as nutrition and lifestyle though at the same time pointed out identifiable mechanisms involved in these benefits and the role of polyphenols. On the basis of these observations, they recommended that wine should be part of a varied, balanced diet, that its consumption should always be moderate and that abstinence should be practised under certain circumstances, such as pregnancy or when driving. Their overriding conclusion for the wine industry has been very divided over reference to health benefits, some organisations are currently considering the possibility of including them in advertising campaigns, although a complaint was recently upheld against the ASA in the UK for stating the health benefit benefits of beer in the Grocer magazine.

Diageo Breakthrough In Fight Against Counterfeit Scotch

A major step in the global fight against counterfeiting has been announced by Diageo Scotland with the launch of the Scotch whisky industry's first ever miniaturised spectroscopic portable testing kit - the authenticator - which will help crack down on counterfeit Scotch whisky.

Developed by scientists at Diageo's Brand Technical Centre in Menstrie, Clackmannanshire for an investment of £100,000, the Authenticator deploys ultraviolet technology to test the authenticity of Diageo's Scotch whisky brands. Diageo hopes that the it will ultimately be used across the whole industry, addressing a global issue.

Currently, the industry standard for verification of Scotch whisky is through laboratory-based analysis – a process which can take up to two weeks. The Diageo authenticator has been designed to work in the field and cuts the screening process down to less than one minute. This brings obvious cost savings but more importantly means that action against the counterfeiters can be swift. The authenticators have successfully undergone a series of trials and with final modifications will be rolled out to Diageo companies world wide. Diageo plan roll to make the technology available to trading standards authorities and other scotch whisky companies.

Portman Group Launch Postcards Aimed At Women

One drink and you might open up.

Another – perhaps you'll bloom?

One too many and .....

Oops a daisy, you could have blown it petal!

"Respect alcohol, respect yourself" - That's the message from the Portman Group this Spring. The Group has launched a range of postcards aimed at women. They are circulating in pubs, bars, cinemas and coffee shops from 8th March to coincide with International Women's Day.

Jean Coussins, Chief Executive of the Portman Group commented "Women aren't doing themselves any damage if they have a couple of units a day, but if they guzzle 14 units in one go, they're asking for trouble. And its not just the risk of being assaulted, or having a purse or mobile phone nicked. By binge drinking repeatedly young women may be increasing the risk of becoming infertile, or developing breast cancer, heart disease and liver damage".

Gaining Better Press for Wine in France

In response to demonstrations and representations made by the French wine industry in February and March, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin agreed to review current advertising restrictions on wine and set up working parties to assess wine's place in French society.

The national wine agency, Afivin, which is funded by various strands of the industry, has just released a series of proposals for a three-year strategy aimed at improving the perception of wine in the domestic market, which it hopes will contribute to the on-going debate. It suggests a number of actions with the underlying aim of encouraging wine's 'objective allies' to help it gain better exposure and press.

Five key goals have been defined: (1) emphasise that wine can be part of a modern lifestyle and that it is different from other drinks; (2) stress how wine forms part of a balanced diet and inform doctors clearly and objectively about the health benefits of sensible drinking; (3) highlight the social role played by wine and how it can contribute to quality of life; (4) develop a constructive approach to values involving moderation, balance and sensible behaviour advocated by the industry across the board; and (5) roll out positive, ethical advertising and public relations drives on wine thanks to greater awareness of moderation.

US Inter-State Alcohol Sales

The legal wrangle about inter-state alcohol sales in the US has taken yet another twist. In March the Institute for Justice asked the Supreme Court to overturn a ruling by the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals which banned out-of-state wine producers from selling directly to local residents.

The Court of Appeals ruling, last month, reversed a previous lower court decision and said New York could require wineries to establish a local distributor, (even if it is just a shop), before being allowed to ship wine to consumers.

The Institute for Justice request follows a brief filed last week with the Supreme Court by 36 state attorneys general, who want the court to overturn an earlier Court of Appeals ruling that declared Michigan's ban on direct shipments was unconstitutional.

The attorneys general say that conflicting court rulings in Michigan, New York and elsewhere have made it unclear whether alcohol shipments are governed by the US Constitution's 21st Amendment - which allows states to regulate alcohol - or its commerce clause, which says only Congress can regulate interstate trade. They also say states need new direction now that the Internet has made it easier to buy alcohol across state lines.

The Supreme Court has not yet announced whether it will hear the case.

UK Government to Launch Campaign Against Binge Drinking

The UK government is expected to invite agencies to pitch this summer for a £3 million campaign to promote sensible drinking and warn people of the dangers of binge drinking. The Department of Health and COI Communications want the campaign to tell young people that "its not cool to get drunk". But Whitehall insiders admitted that the budget, to be spread over three years, will be " a drop in the ocean" compared with the £200 million spent by the drinks industry advertising its products."

Although the limited spend may rule out TV spots, officials hope that the ads will be hard hitting, along the lines of those about smoking and drink-driving, and attract widespread media attention. "It will try to get across, through peer pressure an attitudinal change that the idea of going out on Friday and Saturday night and drinking as much as possible is not really a very cool thing to do," a Cabinet Office Spokesman said.

In a strategy on alcohol abuse published in March, the Government conceded that its current sensible drinking message, based on units of alcohol for men and women, was out of date, and was not working. It announced that Ofcom would undertake a review by this autumn of the code of practice for TV advertising "to ensure that it does not target young drinkers of glamorise irresponsible behaviour".

Drinking Pattern May Affect Your Risk of Mortality

A further study led by Gronbaek published in Epidemiology, has revealed that changes in alcohol intake result in corresponding changes in mortality levels. The research found that in a study of 6,644 men and 8,010 women aged between 25 and 98, those who had reduced their drinking from light drinking to none increased their risk of coronary heart disease mortality by 40% and those who had increased from non-drinking to light drinking reduced their relative risk ratio by 29%. "Persons with stable patterns of light and moderate alcohol intake had the lowest all-cause mortality", claimed the researchers. The findings suggest that non-drinkers may benefit from changing to light or moderate drinking. The aim of this study was to provide a step toward the establishment of a causal association between changes in drinking habits and mortality, while taking possible confounders into account. "It is possible that the alcohol-mortality relation –particularly in the non-drinking group – is confounded by concurrent diseases, traits, or lifestyle factors associated with both level of alcohol intake and with mortality. Moreover, cumulative or irreversible effects of previous alcohol intake may influence mortality after a change in intake", pointed out the researchers.

SOURCE: Gronbaek M et al. Changes in Alcohol Intake and Mortality: A Longitudinal Population-based Study. Epidemiology 2004;15:222-8.

A Prospective Study Of Drinking Pattern and Mortality in Middle-Aged Danish Men and Women

This population-based cohort study was conducted between 1993 and 2003 in Denmark; a total of 26,909 men and 29,626 women aged 55-65 years of age were studied. The investigators obtained risk estimates for all-cause mortality for different quantity and frequency of alcohol intake adjusted for various lifestyle factors, including diet. During the follow up, 1,528 men and 915 women died; for the same average consumption of alcohol, a less-frequent intake related to a higher risk of death than a more frequent pattern. The researchers concluded, "Drinking pattern and not just the total amount of alcohol consumed is important for the association between alcohol intake and mortality." They further explain, "These results suggest that future public guidelines concerning sensible alcohol drinking should include messages about drinking pattern together with quantity of alcohol."

SOURCE: Reference: Tolstrup JS et al, Drinking Pattern and Mortality in Middle-Aged Men and Women, Addiction, 2004, 99(3): 323-330.

Healthy Lifestyle Reduces Risk of CHD in Men

In this analysis from the Health Professionals' Study, with 14 years of follow up, the relation between several components of a healthy lifestyle were related to the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). The healthy lifestyle factors defined were (1) non-smoking, (2) BMI < 25, (3) moderate to vigorous exercise 30 minutes per day, (4) one half to two drinks of alcohol per day, and (5) being in the upper 40% of a healthy diet score (higher scores resulted from multivitamin use; higher intakes of fish, chicken, vegetables, fruit; and lower consumption of red and processed meats).

As has been seen in most other studies, consumption of one half to two drinks per day resulted in a 21% lower risk of CHD. Among the 4% of their subjects who met all 5 criteria for a healthy lifestyle, at the risk of CHD was reduced by two thirds from that of other subjects (RR=0.34, 95% CI 0.23-0.52). The authors conclude that a large proportion (65-72%) of CHD in the US could be prevented if people followed all five components of the defined A healthy lifestyle.

SOURCE: Adherence to Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors Reduces Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in Men. Stephanie E Chiuve, Harvard Sch of Public Health, Boston, MA; Marjorie L McCullough, American Cancer Society, Atlanta, GA; Meir J Stampfer, Walter C Willett, Eric B Rimm; Harvard Sch of Public Health, Boston, MA.Presented at American Heart Association Epidemiological meetings March 2004

Cardioprotective Effects of Alcohol

An in-depth scientific review article by Dr. Morton Gronbaek from the Center of Alcohol Research at the Danish National Institute of Health states: "The impact of alcohol intake on mortality from all causes has been described in a large number of prospective population studies from many countries. Most have shown a J-shaped relation between alcohol intake and subsequent mortality, indicating that there are both beneficial and harmful effects of ethanol on health. The risk of death from ischemic heart disease is seen to be significantly decreased among moderate drinkers, and highest among abstainers, but not significantly increased among heavy drinkers. Some studies have found plausible mechanisms for the beneficial effect of light to moderate drinking. Subjects with a moderate alcohol intake have a higher level of high density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL) than abstainers. Further, moderate drinkers are seen to have a lower low density lipoprotein (LDL). Also, alcohol has a beneficial effect on platelet aggregation and other factors related to blood clotting within arteries. At the high end of the in range of intake, the ascending leg of the U-shaped curve has been explained by the increased risk of cirrhosis, pancreatitis, and development of pharynx, oesophagus, and breast cancer. In exploring the "French Paradox", it has been suggested that wine may have beneficial effects additional to that of ethanol. Recently, several prospective population studies have supported this idea. It is, however, also likely that the apparent additional beneficial effect of wine on health in addition to the effect of ethanol itself is due to the consequence of confounding."

SOURCE: Gronbaek M, The Epidemiologic Evidence for the Cardioprotective Effects Associated with the Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages, Pathophysiology. 2004 Apr; 10(2):83-92

60% of U.S. Adults Drink, 23% Smoke, 25% Teetotal

According to the survey from the National Center for Health Statistics, 60 percent of U.S. adults drink alcohol and up to 20 percent are binge drinkers, according to a new comprehensive report of American habits and vices. About 23 percent are smokers, and half have never touched a cigarette.

22 percent were obese, meaning they are 20 percent or more overweight, and an additional 35 percent were overweight in the 1999-2000 study period.

About 40 percent were in a healthy weight range and despite fears about media images contributing to unhealthy expectations about thinness, just two percent were underweight, the report found.

The NCHS, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the fact sheet released is the most detailed look yet at the health habits of Americans.

It said six in 10 U.S. adults were current drinkers in 1999-2001 and about 25 percent said they were lifetime abstainers. "Nearly one-third of adults were classified as light drinkers (3 or fewer drinks per week)," the NCHS said in a statement. Just 5 percent were classified as heavier drinkers, which for a woman means seven or more drinks per week and 14 a week for men, with 20 percent saying they sometimes drank five or more drinks a day.

The study found that men and women are equally likely to be obese, and men were more likely than women to be physically active in their leisure time.

In general, Americans of Asian descent were less likely to have succumbed to unhealthy behaviours such as drinking too much, smoking or to be overweight, the report found.

For more information about the National Health Interview Survey visit the CDC/NCHS Web site.

High Achieving Women At Greater Risk Of Alcohol Misuse

Women executives are more likely to develop an alcohol problem than junior staff according to researchers at University College London.

Women executives drink more alcohol than men in similar grades, It is thought the stress of trying to compete with men for executive roles is partly to blame.

8,000 government employees took part in the survey of men and women working at different levels in 20 departments in London. The prevalence of problem drinking among the men was roughly the same (between 10 and 12%) from clerical right through to senior executive grades. Women at lower grades were less likely to be problem drinkers than men in comparable grades, however, senior female executives were more than three times as likely to be problem drinkers (14%) as those working in the lowest clerical grades (4%).

The employees were asked about the demands of their job, their levels of support at work and at home and the degree to which they could make and influence decisions. They were also measured on a points basis for the amount of effort they made and the rewards they received in terms of promotional prospects, pay, and the sense of feeling valued.

The object of the research was to look at whether work stress was linked to alcohol dependence, said senior lecturer in epidemiology and public health at University College London Jenny Head, who led the research. "It may be that women feel they have to compete on an equal footing and take on male roles and behaviours….People who find they put in effort and don't feel they are getting rewards are more at risk of becoming a problem drinker…..We have already shown that stressful conditions at work can lead to poorer health for people".

SOURCE: Head J et al. The psychosocial work environment and alcohol dependence: a prospective study. Occup Environ Med 2004;61:219-24.

Beer's Potential Role in Preventing Colon Cancer

While reports in humans are conflicting, with some showing an increased risk, new research by Japanese researchers showed that beer or eating certain components found in the beverage may protect against colon cancer in rats. The study assessed the ability of beer or its components to prevent a type of chemically induced colon cancer in 344 rats. Consumption of beer or malt extract for two weeks reduced the amount of DNA damage that occurred. In addition, beer intake for the full five-week study period reduced the formation of early lesions that can develop into colon cancer.

The researchers also stated that the ability of beer to inhibit these lesions depended on the type of malt, with dark-roasted malts being more effective than pilsner malts. In addition, only freeze-dried beer, not ethanol, had a protective effect. Intake of malt extract also inhibited the early lesions, but consumption of hops extract did not. In a 42-week follow-up study, beer intake was associated with a 22-percent reduction in the tumor rate, including a big plunge in the number of cancers. While this study was in rats, and has not been evaluated in humans, the authors state: "The results suggest that daily moderate consumption of beer may reduce the risk of cancer susceptibility in colon." However, they also underscore that further studies are needed to verify this and to determine the mechanisms involved.

SOURCE: Nozawa H et al. Intake of beer inhibits azoxymethane-induced colonic carcinogenesis in male Fischer 344 rats. Intern Journal of Cancer 2004.

Can The Light to Moderate Consumption of Alcohol Affect Fertility and Fecundity? by Creina Stockley

The November 30 2003 edition of Decanter suggested that "wine-drinking women have [a] better chance of becoming pregnant, research finds". This headline refers to a paper entitled Intake of wine, beer and spirits, and waiting time to pregnancy by Juhl et al. in 2003. The paper suggested that sexually active women who consumed wine had a slightly shorter waiting time to pregnancy than consumers of beer and spirits and non-consumers, but whether this was an effect of wine itself or the characteristics of the wine drinker was unknown. The differential effect of wine compared to beer and spirit consumers was, however, small. This paper followed from a previous paper, which suggested that light to moderate consumers of alcohol has a slightly shorter waiting time to pregnancy than those who abstained (Juhl et al. 2001), and is purportedly the first paper to examine the relationship between the consumption of specific types of alcoholic beverages and fecundity.

Fertility (reproductive ability) and fecundity, which is the waiting time to pregnancy, are positively correlated.

Infertility is often multi-factorial and common causes of infertility include ovulatory factors such as anovulation, cervical factors and endometriosis. In the past decade there has been an increased demand for fertility treatment in the western world (Olsen et al. 1997), and an increased awareness of environmental or external causes, including an association with alcohol consumption.

The relationship between alcohol consumption and fertility and fecundity is an issue of controversy. The results of research studies are conflicting and have shown both positive and negative effects of alcohol on fertility and fecundity, which may merely reflect a combination of different study designs and confounding factors. Grodstein et al. (1994), for example, suggested that any amount of alcohol decreased fertility while Olsen et al. (1997) Jensen et al. (1998) and Hakim et al. (1998) linked only heavy alcohol consumption to decreased fertility. The latter two studies

also suggested that the chances of successful conception decreased as alcohol consumption increased. Neither study analysis included anovular women, however, nor did they consider the pattern of alcohol consumption across the days of the menstrual cycle. Other studies by Florack et al. (1994), Zaadstra et al. (1994), Curtis et al. (1997) and Parazzini et al. (1999) did not observe an effect of any amount of alcohol consumption on fertility. Other confounding factors include: age of women studied as fertility and fecundity are negatively correlated with female age, reproductive inability, which may reflect failure of endometrial implantation rather than a failure in fertilization (West 1987, Hull et al. 1994); and the timeframe of alcohol consumption, that is whether alcohol was consumed during, prior to and/or following attempts to conceive. Indeed, prior chronic or long-term alcohol consumption may be an independent risk factor for fertility and fecundity (Tolstrup et al. 2003).

In general for women, heavy alcohol consumption, which is generally defined as greater than two 10 g drinks of alcohol per day, has been consistently associated with anovulation and increased endometriosis (Grodstein et al. 1994). It has also been associated with a change in level of female reproductive hormones, for example, an increase in the level of oestrogen (Mendelson et al. 1987, Gavaler et al. 1993, Muti et al. 1998) and a decrease in the level of progesterone (Sarkola et al. 1999), although changes in the ratio of these hormones may be more biologically significant (Gill 2000). In addition, heavy alcohol consumption has been associated with an increased risk of spontaneous abortion (Windham et al. 1997, Kesmodel et al. 2002).

An association, however, between fertility and fecundity with light to moderate alcohol consumption remains inconsistent and hence controversial. The study by Juhl et al. in 2003 did, however, observe that a higher proportion of those sexually active women who waited more than 12 months to become pregnant were heavier consumers of alcohol than those who waited less than 12 months. Interestingly, the definition of heavier alcohol consumption was greater than seven 12 g alcoholic drinks per week, which is only approximately one drink per day, and this is defined as low-risk consumption in Australia for women (NH&MRC 2001).

In conclusion, there are too few studies that consistently show an association between light to moderate alcohol consumption and fertility and fecundity to draw any conclusions as to whether women of childbearing age should not consume alcohol when planning to conceive, especially when different study designs and confounding factors are considered. There can be no doubt, however, that the chronic heavy consumption of alcohol during conception may compromise fertility and fecundity and that during pregnancy such alcohol consumption can have detrimental effects on the development and growth of the foetus (Abel and Hannigan 1995).

Furthermore, as Juhl et al. (2003) added in the concluding comments of their paper "the association between wine drinking and waiting time to pregnancy was not very strong and there was no clear dose-response pattern. We encourage other to check available data to see whether they find a similar beneficial effects of wine drinking".

For a full list of references please contact the AIM Bath office. Full references will be available on the Gateway website in July.

Creina Stockley is Health and Regulatory Manager at The Australian Wine Research Institute and a valued member of the AIM Council.

In Vino Longaevitas? By Harvey E. Finkel, M.D.

It has long been said that in wine there is truth; but youth? Recent research has demonstrated that some of the polyphenols of wine appear to extend life span by mechanisms new to us. Maybe Ponce de León should have sought the fountain of youth in the vineyards of his native Spain instead of sloshing through the swamps of Florida.

Be aware that, thus far, these happy tidings pertain only to lower orders of beings, yeast, roundworm, fruitfly. Experiments on mammalian (mouse) cells are planned. The initial work Howitz KT, et al: Nature 2003; 425: 191-196 (11 Sep)—from a team led by David A. Sinclair at the Harvard Medical School, Boston, and BIOMOL Research Laboratories, Inc., Plymouth Meeting, PA, was stimulated by the observation that the stress of severe calorie restriction (30-40 percent fewer than normal) slows the pace of aging and increases the maximum life span of various species. The defense response against such environmental stress involves regulatory genes of longevity that, activated by the stress, have evolved to promote survival. These genes function by increasing the activity of the sirtuin enzyme group, especially Sir2, which, in turn, stabilizes DNA and prevents lethal accumulation of toxic products in older cells.

Obviously, promotion of a stressful degree of caloric reduction is impractical, despite all the attention devoted to overeating by the health professions and the news media. Substances that mimic calorie restriction by stimulating sirtuins and increasing life span were sought, and our old friends, the antioxidant polyphenols of grape skins and wine, answered the call. These compounds perform a complex of functions in vines, including protecting from fungus and sunburn; in wine, inhibiting oxidation; and, we believe, in man, probably mediated, in part, by inhibition of oxidation and stimulation of sirtuins. Their production in plants is stimulated by such stresses as dehydration, lack of nourishment, ultraviolet radiation, and infection. In man, the polyphenols appear to alleviate the disabling and life-shortening degenerative disorders atherosclerosis, dementia, and cancer, benefits also noted in calorie-restricted rodents.

Seventeen polyphenols were found active, especially the now-familiar resveratrol, which extended yeast life span by 70 percent, and which was studied in more detail. Fisetin and butein gave 55 and 31 percent longer life, respectively. Modest concentrations of resveratrol were effective, but higher concentrations not more so, perhaps even less so—a puzzle.

Treating young cells, then stopping, had no lasting benefit. Early studies suggest that resveratrol activates sirtuins in human cells too.

Aging is in part due to oxidative stress, but the lengthening of life at the hands of the antioxidant polyphenols is likely more a function of stimulation of the sirtuins. Part of the benefits may come from suppression of a cancer-causing gene, part from delaying programmed cell suicide, giving the cells additional time to repair damage, thus preventing unnecessary cell death.

Clearly, more work and time are needed, but isn't all this intriguing? Resveratrol is absorbed by, but is excreted very rapidly from the human body, so it is uncertain whether effective levels can be achieved. There is talk of marketing resveratrol capsules, but don't forget red wine, our main source of these polyphenols, whose alcohol abundantly enhances the health benefits of moderate drinking, and whose total package is unbeatable.

And for those of us of at least average weight, calorie restriction might confer health benefits in addition to those of wine.

Harvey Finkel is Clinical Professor of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, and a valued member of the AIM Council.

Drinking Alcohol and Gout by Erik Skovenborg

Gout is one of the oldest diseases in medical literature. The condition is not uncommon; it accounts for at least 5 percent of all significant problems in the field of systemic arthritis. It is uncommon, however, in women; the male-female ratio is 20:1.

In nearly three-quarters of the total number of cases the first attack of gout is confined to the large joint of one of the great toes; hence the Greek term Podagra, or gout of the foot. Podagra was also the name of a lesser goddess born of the seduction of Aphrodite by Dionysus, the deities, respectively, of love and the grape. Down through the ages gout has had a mixed reputation. It is slightly scandalous, through association with excessive food, drink, and sex. Gout was widespread during the Roman Empire and running through the ancient annals on gout is the relation between this disease and the consumption of dainty dishes and alcoholic beverages. Gout stood out as a disease you bring on yourself.

Gout - The Thorn in the Rose of Gastronomy

The Roman gourmands found their equals in the gluttonous and bibulous English gentry of the 18th and 19th centuries. The notion that acute attacks of gout are often provoked by the consumption of large quantities of food and drink enjoyed a popularity that is perhaps best illustrated in the works of the English caricaturists of the early 19th century. The punch-bowl or the wine bottle was usually a close companion to the gouty patient. George H. Ellwanger made the following observation in his book "Meditations on Gout with a consideration of its cure through the use of wine" (New York: Dodd Mead & Co., 1897): "In England, as compared with other countries, the malady was much more common during the three and four bottle days when port was the stable liquid and great quantities of heavy viands were consumed." Ellwanger regarded gout as the sequence of high-living and thorn in the rose of gastronomy, with many years

of savoury dinners and fragrant vintages as its genesis and means of evolution. He was aware, however, that over indulgence was not the only cause of the malady. "It must be remembered that before gout can appear, goitiness must be present, and that uric acid, the toxic property of gout, already exists even in the normal condition of the blood. Man therefore, is born with a distinct gouty tendency, aggravated through the dietetic misdeeds of his ancestors, and furthered by his own voluntary or involuntary lapses."

From Historical Evidence to Controlled Studies

A multitude of observations of patients with a history of gout provide circumstantial evidence that dietary over indulgence contributes to the development of hyperuricaemia in susceptible individuals. A relationship between excessive alcohol intake and hyperuricaemia was also well established by historical evidence. Alfred Garrod declared in 1859: "There is no truth in medicine better established than that the use of fermented or alcoholic liquors is the most powerful of all the predisposing causes of gout; nay, so potent, that it may be a question whether the malady would ever have been known to mankind had such beverages not been indulged in".

These days scientific data from controlled studies enable us a better understanding of the complex interaction between heredity and lifestyle. Concerning the role of alcohol George H. Ellwanger already knew most of the story: "Alcohol is almost universally considered injurious in the diathesis, both by increasing the production of uric acid, and by lessening the excretory power of the kidneys through its continued use." Only today we know the biochemical mechanism:

Increased production of urate: Ethanol administration has been shown to increase uric acid production by increasing adenosine triphosphate degradation to adenosine monophosphate, a uric acid precursor. This process involves acetate conversion to acetyl CoA in the metabolism of ethanol.

Decreased urate excretion: Via conversion of ethanol to lactic acid, which reduces renal uric acid excretion by competitively inhibiting uric acid excretion by the proximal tubule.

The Proscribed Fluids

Uric acid is the metabolic end-product of purines and normally is steadily excreted into the urine. Gout is a hereditary disorder of purine metabolism resulting in deposition, in and about the joints, of salts of uric acid, which is present in marked excess throughout the body in persons with the disorder. Diet plays a role in gout, and the usual advice is to go easy on high-purine foods, particularly kidney, liver and other innards. The purine content of alcoholic drinks is negligible - except for beers. In a group of English patients with gout, beer was the most popular beverage, and 40% of the gouty men consumed more than 2.5 litres of beer daily. The heavy drinkers had a significantly higher intake of purine nitrogen, half of which was derived from beer (Annals of Rheumatic Diseases 1983;42:123-27).

These findings have been echoed by a recent study. Systematic prospective research on the effect of different alcoholic beverages on gout remained lacking until the report in the April 17 2004 issue of The Lancet by Hyon Choi and colleagues. These researchers did a prospective study on 47150 male medical professionals with a follow-up as long as 12 years. The results confirmed that alcohol intake in general was associated with increased risk for gout. Overall the risk was 2.5 times higher among men who consumed more than four or five drinks daily, and even those who consumed as little as one drink had a 30 percent increase in risk.

The risk varied substantially according to the type of alcoholic beverage. Intake of two or more beers daily increased risk 2.5 fold, while consuming two drinks that each contained a shot of liquor increased risk 1.6 times. Moderate drinking of wine did not increase the risk of gout. "While there had been some suggestion that beer might have a greater contribution to risk, we were surprised to see such a strong difference," Choi says. "It certainly suggests that individuals with gout should try to limit or even cut out their beer consumption, whereas wine may be allowed, given other health benefits associated with moderate alcohol consumption." As to why beer confers a larger risk than spirits and wine, Choi and colleagues think that the high purine content of beer has a role. However, special ingredients of hops, such as isohumolones, could have a role in uric-acid metabolism and excretion. As to why wine does not increase the risk of gout, the researchers say that some unknown factor might be present in wine which mitigates alcohol's effect on the risk of gout.

Erik Skovenborg is a General Practitioner, founder member of the Scandanavian Medical Alcohol Board and a member of AIM's Council.

Brief Mail Interventions As An Effective Tool Among Young People

The objectives of this research undertaken by a research fellow at a New Zealand University were (1) to determine whether brief intervention is effective in reducing hazardous drinking among young people, and (2) to identify the specific conditions which make it effective in terms of setting, duration, and method. The study analyzed responses from 1,638 college students in four countries aged 15 to 24. The study reports that brief intervention methods relying on mail or computers are both appealing and effective among young people. Specifically, the study found that a five-minute in-person intervention has proven to be as effective as longer interventions. Among college students, hazardous drinkers respond well to electronic assessment and feedback about their alcohol consumption, as opposed to a discussion about their drinking with a doctor or other health professional. The use of "motivational feedback" where information is provided to an individual which draws attention to discrepancies between their health goals and their actual behavior is most effective among college students when administered electronically as when privately mailed to the individual. Such approaches could reach even more students if disseminated through electronic means.

SOURCE: February, 2004, alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental research

University of Alabama at Birmingham Receives First Major US Government Grant For Study of Alcohol and Cardiovascular Health

In an unprecedented breakthrough, the US Government's National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) provided the first major multidisciplinary programmatic grant to study the effects of moderate consumption on cardiovascular health to the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Specifically, the federal government of the United States has committed a large sum of money to the scientific exploration of the basic mechanistic link between moderate alcohol consumption and lowered risk of heart disease, which should help clarify how individual components of wine (in particular, alcohol and principal polyphenols) can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in certain individuals. This is of major significance, as some researchers and policy organizations have cautioned that any positive advice about alcohol and coronary heart disease can only be given if the scientific community has better and more extensively identified the possible molecular mechanisms involved. This article will briefly outline the key facts about this new grant program and explain the ongoing work by the UAB research team. This exciting new programme has the potential to become an important and essential scientific cornerstone to public health and general consumer messages about moderate consumption for many years to come.

Specifics about the US Government Grant on Wine and Cardiovascular Health

Last autumn, the NHLBI, part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), awarded a $7.6 million, 5-year Programme Project Grant (PPG) to the School of Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to examine the cellular, molecular and genetic mechanisms that enable wine components (alcohol and principal polyphenols) to potentially reduce the risk for heart disease. Dr. Francois M. Booyse, Professor of Medicine and Director of Molecular Cardiology at UAB, who will lead the research efforts of more than 17 researchers, termed the grant award "a major milestone." While some government-funded research studies have investigated the health effects of moderate drinking, federal agencies have been primarily concerned with research investigations on the adverse effects of alcohol misuse over the last several decades. This new multidisciplinary grant will support numerous research projects to better identify some of the mechanisms responsible for the observed positive cardiovascular health effects, as they remain poorly defined and understood.

> ***"This is the first major programmatic effort to be recognized and funded by the NHLBI that will focus specifically on the molecular mechanisms underlying the health-related benefits of moderate alcohol/wine consumption. It represents the first major consensus by both the scientific and health professionals of the emerging importance of the scientific implications, issues and unanswered questions remaining in the rapidly evolving area of wine and cardiovascular health."***
>
> Francois Booyse, PhD. UAB Press Statement 2003

Important Scientific Contributions by the UAB Research Team

The potential benefits of moderate wine, beer and spirits consumption have been confirmed in many scientific studies from cohorts around the world for over two decades. Scientific experts have concluded that these positive health effects are primarily the result of alcohol's effect on different blood lipids and coagulation mechanisms that reduce the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) and overall CHD-related mortality. In the ongoing search to identify all the parameters involved, investigators have also found that different constituents in the beverages may be responsible for some of the observed positive health effects. In fact, since the early 90s, researchers from the United States and different parts of the world have published preliminary data associating polyphenols, flavonoids, and phytochemicals with certain properties that may contribute to improved health outcomes. However, most of these studies have taken place in vitro (in the laboratory) or in animals, and it is still not certain that these biological effects translate to humans. At the same time, these types of scientific explorations have contributed to the emerging evidence that these polyphenols can reduce the rate of harmful cell oxidation and favourably affect other processes that, if unchanged, could lead to atherosclerosis and heart disease.

Most recently, some of the cutting edge research has been undertaken by a team of investigators at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) where new investigative approaches have identified additional mechanisms by which these constituents in the beverages may reduce the risk of certain diseases and especially CHD This comprehensive work on beverage-related compounds (i.e. alcohol and polyphenols) and their potential disease-preventing effects is being carried out by a team of world-renowned experts under the leadership of Dr. Francois M. Booyse, a prominent cardiovascular disease and wine researcher. They have established their laboratory as one of the leading research groups to investigate the basic mechanisms that are involved in the cardioprotective effects of moderate alcohol consumption. In fact, their ongoing scientific research has revealed that cardioprotective results may derive not only from individual polyphenolic components per se, but also from additive or perhaps synergistic effects of alcohol and polyphenol components on a variety of vascular, cellular and haemostatic functions.

> *"In combination, these multiple alcohol- or red wine component-induced changes will be expected to provide significant overall cardiovascular disease protection by decreasing the early initiation of thrombosis, atherogenesis and the atherothrombotic consequences of myocardial infarction, thus reducing the eventual overall risk for CHD-related mortality."*
>
> Booyse F and Parks D, Moderate Wine and Alcohol Consumption: Beneficial Effects on Cardiovascular Disease, Thrombosis and Homeostasis, 2002

Over the past few years Dr. Booyse's research team has developed new methods and approaches, using live cultured human endothelial cells and animal models, to study alcohol and polyphenol-induced changes on haemostatic function. In particular, they have focused on increased fibrinolysis (clot or thrombus lysis), which may underlie and partly contribute to the reduced risk for thrombosis and cardiovascular disease and, therefore, may afford cardioprotection. Specifically, their published research has shown that both alcohol and polyphenols are potent stimulators of increased and sustained endothelial cell fibrinolysis, thus promoting clot lysis and reducing thrombotic risk. The investigators, however, have explained that while polyphenols have been established as potent antioxidants, their duration of action is relatively short-lived. Consequently, Dr. Booyse's research group has shifted their focus from the antioxidant properties of these compounds to their potential ability to alter critical gene expression and function, in particular fibrinolysis that can be sustained for 24 hours or longer. Specifically, they have examined the effects of alcohol and polyphenols on the expression of proteins and pathways that can lead to increased fibrinolysis (including, tissue-type plasminogen activator, t-PA; urokinase-type plasminogen activator, u-PA and plasminogen activator inhibitor type 1, PAI-1). T-PA is an agent that is administered after a myocardial infarction (heart attack) to facilitate clot lysis. The investigators' results have shown that both alcohol and polyphenols can alter the expression of a number of different fibrinolytic protein genes, resulting in increased fibrinolysis. This cutting-edge research data has been published in a series of papers in the Journal, Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research. In fact, close to three dozen scientific studies as well as presentations and abstracts have been published by this distinguished research team in the areas of cardiovascular biology and myocardial function/ metabolism.

Organizations such as The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), as well as the Alcoholic Beverage Medical Research Foundation (ABMRF), supported several important UAB research studies that contributed to the application to the NHLBI.

The Research, Education and Social Policy Value of the UAB 5 Year Project Grant

New scientific results from the UAB research programme will lead to new scientific mechanisms and insights that will contribute to the shaping of science-based lifestyle messages about moderate wine, beer and spirits consumption for years to come. As Dr Booyse and colleagues explain, "This research programme will continue to identify and define the molecular regulatory mechanisms by which alcohol and polyphenols can increase fibrinolysis, in vitro, in cultured human endothelial cells and, in vivo, in animal models, to provide a well-defined molecular basis by which increased fibrinolysis can contribute, in part, to the overall cardiovascular disease protective mechanisms attributed to moderate alcohol or red wine consumption."

This rapidly emerging new area of cardioprotection research through new and continuing research efforts from this and other groups worldwide should provide significant new insights into our understanding of the multiple divergent mechanisms that underlie and contribute to cardiovascular disease protection. These findings may have long-term public health policy implications as policy groups such as the American Heart Association and others have called for more research discoveries in this developing field. These prominent scientific investigations will contribute to more ongoing research, more detailed policy messages and further consumer education messages addressing the facts about moderate drinking and CHD. In summary, these ongoing new initiatives will start to deal with the many unanswered questions related to the nutritional and lifestyle effects of polyphenols so that the public can be given the most sensible advice with respect to the responsible consumption of alcohol as part of a well balanced diet.

> *"In concert, results gleaned from these combined multidisciplinary studies, under the auspices of this Programme Project Grant, will provide significant new insights into our overall understanding of the potential, importance and role of these diverse molecular regulatory mechanisms that may be mechanistically linked to the cardiovascular disease protective benefits attributed to moderate alcohol and red wine consumption."*
>
> Booyse F, NHLBI Application, 2003

This is a fundamental effort that will be supported by the research, education and policy communities alike. Over the months and years to come, UAB will be one of the leading scientific resources on wine, alcohol and cardiovascular health. Their government funded data will be communicated in the most credible and responsible ways to the research and policy communities worldwide.

To learn more about the UAB research program and planned new Center education and other related program activities, please contact Dr. François M. Booyse at, (205) 934-4296 or booyse@uab.edu.

This report was compiled by Elisabeth Holmgren Director of US Operations for AIM. For further details please email Elisabeth.Holmgren@Aim-Digest.com

Low Alcohol Taxes Around Sweden by Christopher Jarnvall

On 1 March this year Finland radically reduced its alcohol taxes. The spirits tax was lowered by 44%, the tax on intermediates by 40%, the wine tax by 10% and the beer tax by 30%. The reason is Estonia's EU accession in May. Alcohol is very inexpensive in Estonia and even after the Finnish tax cut, the Estonian taxes are much lower.

Not only the Finnish Monopoly prices are down. The tax cut also forced the ferry lines to reduce their duty free prices. Otherwise those prices should have been higher than the new Monopoly prices. The price cut onboard will be around 20%. Viking Line prices will be lower than Silja Line prices. To the ferry lines the price cut is a loss of profit that must be compensated by an increase of the fares.

There are no experiences of the effects of price cuts in Finland. However, experts say it is obvious that the Finnish consumption will increase and that alcohol related deaths will increase. In Finland heavy drinking and intoxication is more accepted than in Sweden, thus causing more deaths. Approximately 6% of all deaths in Finland are caused by alcohol. More than 3,100 persons died of alcohol last year. The tax cuts are estimated to increase the consumption by around 1 litre pure alcohol per capita, which means some 10%.

This change in Finnish alcohol policies means, that Sweden is more or less surrounded by low tax countries. The only exception is Norway.

From Haparanda, a Swedish border town in the northern country, it is some 1,000 metres from the Swedish Monopoly shop to the Finnish in Tornio. Both shops are estimating that many Swedes will do the walk to Tornio to buy spirits, while the Fins will walk to the Swedish shop to buy beer and cider, which is still cheaper in Sweden. Finnish shops close to northern Norway calculate that many Norwegians will buy alcohol in Finland.

It is not only are the Finnish tax cuts that are feared by the Swedes. When the Baltic states obtain EU membership, the ferry traffic to those countries will increase. Those routes will not attract passengers with low duty free prices. Instead the ferry lines will probably offer special facilities to get huge amounts of alcohol, purchased in the country of destination, onboard and aboard. In the Baltic states the spirits tax is 17.5 % of the Swedish.

Finally, it looks like the Swedish Government is is full awake and would like to do something radical. But how should they pass the Riksdag, where many MP:s are still asleep?

Christopher Jarnvall is Editor of Alcohol Update in Sweden and a valued member of the AIM Council.

Profile: Dr Philip Norrie

Dr. Philip Norrie, General Practioner, vineyard owner and alcohol and health specialist was born in Sydney, Australia in 1953. In 1971 Dr. Norrie began his medical studies at the University of New South Wales, where he trained and did his internship at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney and later gained his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery degrees.

In 1992, Dr. Norrie became the first graduate from the newly formed History and Philosophy of Science Department at the University of Sydney gaining a master of Science degree and in 1997 Dr. Norrie completed his second Masters Degree, a Master of Social Science with Honours from Charles Sturt University.

Dr. Norrie's current project is a Doctor of Philosophy on the history of wine as a medicine, through the ages including today's research.

In 1986, Dr. Norrie started to pursue his great interest in wine and health by researching the biographies of all the 160 doctors in Australia, who have founded vineyards, resulting in a book called "Australia's Wine Doctors".

Other papers written by Dr. Norrie include "Wine and Health - a new look at an Old Medicine", "The Art of Sensible Drinking", "Some Most Unusual Vineyards - The Vineyards in Australia's Lunatic Asylums" and the booklet "Wine and Health", which was published by McWilliam Wines. Dr. Norrie's latest wine related literary project is his "Wine and Health Diary".

Dr. Norrie is the Founder and President of the Australian Medical Friends of Wine Society, and has been a valued member of the AIM Social Scientific and Medical Council for many years. In 1986, together with his wife Belinda, Dr. Norrie founded the boutique 50 acre vineyard, Pendarves Estate, from 75 acres of bush at Belford in the lower Hunter Valley Wine region, to the north of Sydney.

Dr. Norrie is also a lecturer and Ph.D. research fellow in the wine course at the School of Food Sciences, Faculty of Food and Environmental Sciences, University of Western Sydney, Richmond, focusing on wine and health.

DWI System Improvements: Stopping the Revolving Door

This comprehensive study by Robin D Robertson and Herb M. Simpson identifies ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the U.S. criminal DWI system for dealing with hard core drinking drivers. Its identifies priority problems and recommends practical solutions in each phase of the justice system.

The entire spectrum of policies, programs and practices that target hard core drinking drivers was examined - from initial apprehension and charging by the police, through prosecution and adjudication, to the application of sanctions, and follow-up supervision by probation and parole officers. The research was based on an extensive literature review, supplemented by intensive discussions with front-line professionals, and a national survey of their views, opinions, experiences and recommendations.

Collectively, the four major reports on enforcement, prosecution, sanctioning and monitoring provide a roadmap for improving the criminal DWI system.

The key findings and recommendations are synthesized in the Summary Report, which also encourages the development of a coordinated action plan for the implementation of the needed changes. To this end, TIRF has formed a Working Group on DWI System Improvements to advance the recommendations contained in the Summary Report. for further details visit www.trafficinjuryresearch.com

Moonshine Markets Review by Peter Duff

The term Moonshine is commonly associated with the illicit production of alcohol.

Strict control policies, taxation, prohibition, government and other monopolies are common reasons, why for centuries Alcoholic Beverages have been made outside the law.

The 14 years of prohibition in the United States, created a huge demand for illicit alcohol which was often distributed and controlled by criminal gangs. Prohibition has officially been in force in the world of Islam for 12 centuries. The Temperance movement in the 19th and 20th centuries called for a ban on intoxicating beverages which had the effect of driving demand underground.

Home brewed alcoholic drinks, beer, fruit based beverages, palm wine and distillation from a wide variety of raw materials are made in many counties of the world.

Alan Haworth and Ronald Simpsons book explores a largely uncharted area, they estimate that at least half of the consumption of alcohol throughout the world is basically Moonshine. This in itself is an important reason to collate data on why and how this situation exists in a modern world.

Their studies are limited to parts of Africa, Brazil , Mexico and India. It is to be hoped that these will be expanded to Russia, the Eastern block and Scandinavia in due course. They explain that there are few common factors involved and that each country in unique. Extensive poverty is a prime motivator, as Moonshine avoids the taxation and controls which surround legal alcohol. It often wrongly considered that illicit alcohol is a danger to health, this is not always the case. Governments and public health authorities should work together to reduce the harm from contaminated beverages.

This book looks at the complex issues involved and clearly shows that there are a wide variety of Moonshine markets. Throughout the world , indeed there is an entire culture associated with the illicit production of alcohol.

Moonshine is the 6th book in the ICAP series on Alcohol in Society. For further details contact visit www.ICAP.org

Designated Driver Campaigns in Europe Report 2003

On the 30th March, The Amsterdam Group in conjunction with the Arnoldous Group and the Belgian Institute of Road Safety released a report on the Designated Driver campaigns designed to combat drink-driving in Europe during 2003.

According to the report, there are an estimated 50,000 road traffic accidents in the enlarged EU each year - a contributing factor is drink driving. The European Commission has a target to half road deaths by 2010. Eight countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, the UK, Ireland, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain) have formed collaborations between Industry funded Social Aspect Organisations, Road Safety Institutions and the European Commission. Germany, Poland, Malta and the Czech republic are expected to join the scheme in 2005.

The report, which outlines in detail the nature of each countries campaigns, the partners involved, the target audience and the each campaigns effectiveness and duration finds that striking campaigns coupled with effective law enforcement and police checks can change behaviour.

To obtain a copy of the report please contact the Amsterdam Group via www.amsterdamgroup.org

The Liver and Genetics Seminar Review by Dr Bernard Dixon OBE

There are unlikely to be genes that specifically and absolutely predispose a person to develop alcoholic liver disease and/or alcohol dependence. However, the next few years will probably see the discovery of genes that do contribute, in a quantifiable fashion, to the risk of both conditions. Such findings will mean that individuals can be screened for the relevant genes and counselled accordingly. They also raise questions about how society and the drinks industry should respond to a scenario in which a commercial product is particularly harmful to certain, identifiable individuals.

These conclusions emerged from a Portman Group seminar held on 23 March 2004 at the Westbury Hotel, London. The speakers were Professor Chris Day of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, on the inheritance of alcoholic liver disease, and Professor Marc Schuckit of the University of California, San Diego, on the genetics of the risk of alcoholism. The event was chaired by Portman Group consultant Dr Bernard Dixon.

Professor Day observed that the risk of alcoholic liver disease (ALD) increases in proportion to alcohol intake (and that daily consumption is less hazardous than bingeing interspersed with alcohol-free days). Nevertheless, greater consumption does not account for the recent rise in ALD in Britain. The principal reason seems to be increasing obesity.

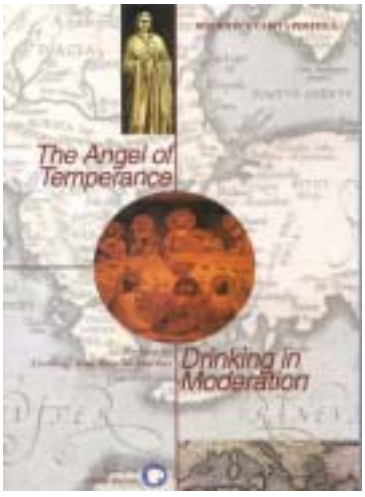
Still unclear is why most heavy drinkers do not develop ALD. Research on families, especially on twins, strongly indicates that some individuals are more susceptible than others for genetic reasons. Two likely types of candidate are the genes which make the enzymes that break down alcohol in the liver and those which produce cytokines, molecules involved in the body's immune system.

Professor Schuckit estimated that multiple genetic factors combined together to explain 40-60% of the risk of alcohol abuse and dependence. Again, the role of heredity is apparent from the repeated observation that close relatives of alcoholics are three to four times more likely than other people to become alcoholics themselves. The increased relative risk is seen even among sons and daughters of alcoholics who have been adopted and raised away from the influence of an alcoholic parent. The same conclusion comes from comparisons between identical twins (who share all of the same genes) and non-identical twins (who do not share all of their genes).

Schuckit's own research focuses not on "genes for alcoholism" per se but on those that determine characteristics which in turn affect the chances of an individual becoming alcoholic. One group of candidates are genes that influence a person's response to alcohol and the level of intake at which they become intoxicated. Also under investigation are genes involved in the detoxification of alcohol by the liver - the same types of gene being studied for their influence on ALD.

The Angel of Temperance - Drinking in Moderation

Preface by Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins



"The family is a special training school that introduces us to friendship, teaches us to care for one another, and is where we will begin to interact with others. The family, especially parents, are entrusted with the sacred and precious task of education. The family must act as the protagonist in a child's education, and both the Church and State have to cooperate."

This fascinating book published by the Vatican takes an in depth look at the role of parents in modern day society through the eyes of a Guardian Angel and offers tools and solutions to deal with the influences of the media and advertising and the role they play in our children's lives - in this context the role played in influencing the purchase and consumption of alcohol.

The history of alcohol within Christianity is discussed and the point made through quotations from the bible that it has always been recognised as a double edged sword ' wine and music delight the soul as long as they are used with sobriety' (Eccles 32:6 40:20). The role of alcohol as a medicine historically leads to a chapter on current alcohol and health research.

The Angel concludes after his mission that Italy's culture of moderate drinking, based on education and respect for family and social values rooted in Mediterranean traditions is threatened by new imported trends influenced by the weakening of family ties. He believes the solution lies in reinforcing the family unit and parental influence by teaching children how to 'lead a simple and balanced lifestyle despite living in a world centred on material goods'.

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