

Action and reaction

A conference held on social responsibility by the Amsterdam (TAG) Group in September was well planned, coinciding as it did with the release of a UK Government interim analysis report on alcohol harm which calculates the culture of binge drinking in the UK is costing the country over £20 billion a year. (see report on page 6).

Entreprise et Prevention, the French Social Aspect Organisation, and the British Beer and Pub Association reported on initiatives to combat drink-driving amongst young people in France and responsible promotions within pubs in Britain respectively.

Kari Paaso, Principal Administrator of the European Commission DG Sanco emphasised the Commission's focus on advertising and promotion to young people. DG Sanco's Draft community Alcohol Policy is due in 2005, although Mr Paaso emphasised the complication

of 10 new member states joining the community next year. The report will analyse the effectiveness of self regulation, study the research of experts on alcohol harm reduction programmes, plus collect accurate statistics on the eco/social burden of alcohol use, alcohol consumption and data on alcohol and health.

The 'take away message' to the delegates from the Commission was that retailers (this includes bars and clubs) as well as alcohol producers must be more involved. The verification of age and the display and marketing of products is deemed very important. Real commitment to self regulation of advertising, responsible product development and marketing by companies must also be demonstrated.

Presentations by Diageo and Heineken on corporate responsibility or

'citizenship' from education of its employees to ensuring a responsible sales force and product development helped demonstrate such commitment.

Yves Bernard, Chairman of the Amsterdam Group summed up the industry position well:

1. **There should be a recognition of the positive contribution that alcohol makes by policy makers balanced with the reduction of misuse.**
2. **Alcohol Policy should recognise responsible drinking and focus on the problem areas.**
- 3 **Finally there should be a balance of well enforced legislation, self regulation and an encouragement of personal responsibility through education and industry/public programmes.**

For full details of the speeches please visit www.amsterdamgroup.org

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News from around the world

Poland

The Polish government is considering a further cut in excise tax on beer and wine. Following an increase in revenue after taxes were cut by 30% last year, the Finance Ministry is proposing to lower the excise tax on beer and wine twice in 2004.

The move is prompted by the fear that Polish retailers would suffer from a grey market once Poland's borders are opened up to the rest of the EU.

Deputy Finance Minister Robert Kwasniak was quoted saying: "The beer and wine excise tax rate could well be altered. This is likely especially in the case of beer, which is subject to much heavier taxation here than in neighbouring countries."

France

A French crackdown on drink-driving since the start of the year has led to a fall of around 4% in alcohol sales in the first half of 2003. In the retail sector, figures at the end of June showed sales of spirits had fallen 3%, aniseed flavoured aperitifs by 4.5% and beers by 2.2%. In the hotel and restaurant sector, the scale of the downturn is even more significant with trade groups pointing to a 10 to 15% decline in the consumption of these categories of drinks.

The French government has said it will not be increasing taxes on wine following significant opposition to the proposed increase from both within and without the country's wine industry. It was considering a new .05E per bottle levy, with the aim of raising E800m for France's healthcare budget. Eric Tesson of the Confederation of Wine Producers commented "It would have been a huge mistake to increase taxes at a time when we are already struggling with fierce competition from abroad."

Scotland

Scotland's Sheriff Principal Gordon Nicholson proposed a major shake of the nation's drinking laws in August, the first of its kind for 27 years. The report calls for a relaxation of drinking hours and the end of happy hour type promotions.

In all the report makes 90 proposals, including allowing under-18s into pubs and introducing national proof of age cards. It also recommends the appointment of enforcement officers to ensure drinking establishments keep to the new guidelines. A public consultation will now review the recommendations until December when the report will be sent to Scottish Parliament.

Sheriff Principal Nicholson commented on the report, "This report represents a substantial package of measures which will simplify and improve Scotland's licensing law and practice."

Australia

The Australian government is considering proposals to include warnings about excessive alcohol consumption on beer, wine and spirit bottles following recommendations from a parliamentary committee. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family & Community Affairs, which also made recommendations regarding drugs and tobacco, has recommended tighter controls on alcohol advertising and family-based programmes to combat alcohol misuse, as well as the inclusion of responsible drinking messages on alcohol labels.

Spain

The Spanish Government is considering putting health warning labels on beer and spirits packaging, but not on wine.

No Alcohol for Under 18's campaign in New Zealand

A high profile public awareness campaign has been launched by the Wellington Liquor Liaison Group in Wellington, encouraging adults to stop and think before they buy or supply alcohol to minors. Based on other ALAC campaigns run in other New Zealand areas, the slogan "Think Before You Supply Under 18's Drink" has adorned bus shelters, supermarkets and liquor outlet carry-bags, posters and badges, as well as incorporated in a set of hard-hitting radio advertisements.

The Wellington Liquor Liaison Group comprises representatives from the Wellington City Council, Wellington District Licensing Authority, NZ Police, ALAC, HANZ, Public Health, Private Training Providers and the Beer, Wine and Spirits Council.

The key message of the group is to promote the responsible consumption of alcohol in Wellington, with the aim of contributing to a reduction in alcohol-

related harm in the community.

BAC limit to be re appraised

BAC levels in New Zealand are again being examined. At present the limit is 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood which the Minister of Transport wishes to reduce to 50mg.

However, whilst reducing the admissible alcohol blood level may seem an obvious step, the Beer Wine and Spirits Council of New Zealand believes closer assessment reveals a number of pitfalls. New Zealand has an excellent record of declining alcohol related fatalities since 1990 (see below) hence the Beer wine and Spirits Council believes focusing on blood alcohol levels penalises the law abiding majority and fails to address the minority of drink- drivers or the hard core of repeat offenders.

For more details visit www.beerwsc.co.nz

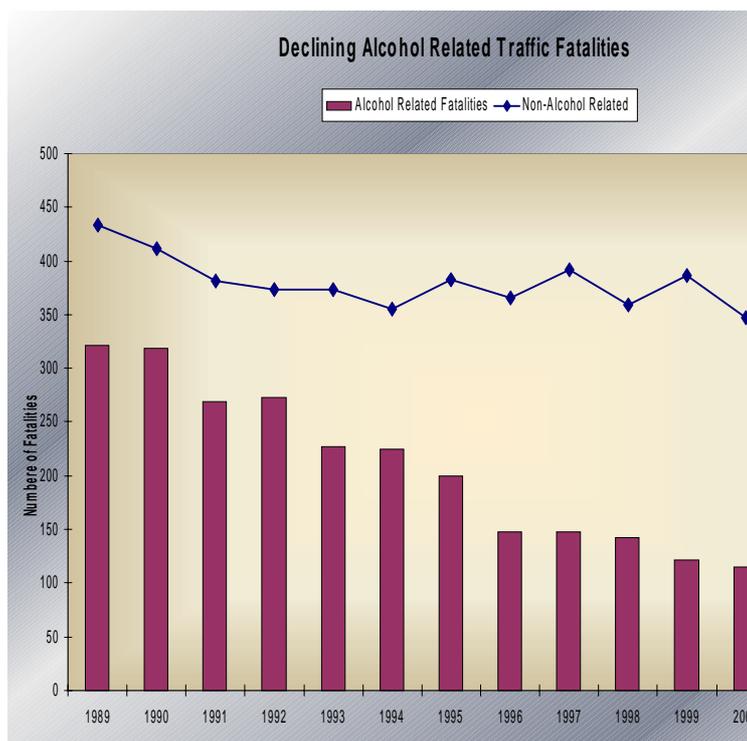
Tax turmoil in Scandanavia

The CEO of the Retail Monopoly, Mrs Anitra Steen, has called for reduced spirits tax in Sweden in order to maintain the confidence in the Monopoly. The Monopoly's share of retail sales due to cross border trade is estimated to be 57% of spirits purchased. Spirits are the most profitable product at the Monopoly. Mrs Steen did not see any reason to reduce the wine or beer taxes, since those products are doing well. The Monopoly share of strong beer sales is 70 % and for wine 80 %.

The Finnish Government has also outlined its proposal on tax reductions from 1 March 2004 to the Parliament. The spirits tax is proposed to be reduced by 44 %, the wine tax by 10 % and the beer tax by 32 %. The tax cuts are due to the fact that Estonia will join the EU on 1 April 2004. The Finnish brewers are not satisfied with the Government's proposal. The 32 % reduction is not enough to counter the cross border trade between Finland and Estonia they claim.

If Finland reduces the taxes following the proposal, Sweden will also be forced to take action. Norway is also contemplating further reductions. Latvia and Lithuania are applying for the same rates as Estonia while Poland is discussing a reduction of the Polish spirits rate. In Sweden, the only clear standpoint has been made by the Conservatives who want a reduction. The coming National Budget, to be issued in late September, is not expected to propose any reduction. Thus a proposal on reduction will probably be made in a separate Bill, in which the Social Democratic Government will seek support from the opposition.

On 2-3 October an 'Alcohol policy summit' will be held in Helsingborg in south Sweden. The meeting is described as a 'constructive forum how to act after the huge tax reduction in Denmark'. Among participants are Health Minister Morgan Johansson, the Head of the Public Health Institute, Gunnar Ågren, the CEO of the Monopoly, Anitra Steen, and representatives of the alcohol Industry and the media.



Recent research about alcohol and colorectal cancer

Creina S. Stockley, The Australian Wine Research Institute



Cells that are overwhelmed by injury and insult can simply autodigest, that is, necrose. Apoptosis is, however, programmed cell death, where the cell is damaged or mutated and fragments into membrane bound fragments for degradation by other cells. The body automatically replaces the cell. Cancer may occur either when the damaged cell fails to undergo apoptosis and proliferates or when the replaced cell is also mutated and proliferates; proliferating cells are most at risk of genotoxic damage. Thus, cancer is basically when the rate of proliferation of mutated cells greatly exceeds the rate of apoptosis.

Alcohol can cause either necrosis or apoptosis, directly or indirectly, which may have positive or negative effects. For example, a positive effect is that alcohol can directly stimulate the death of damaged cells that may lead to cancer, while a negative effect is that alcohol can directly mutate critical genes and stimulate their proliferation. Cancers linked to alcohol consumption include: breast cancer indirectly due to the alcohol-stimulated hepatic metabolism of estrogen; hepatic cancer due to direct cell mutation and proliferation; and aerodigestive tract cancers such as oesophageal cancer due to cell mutation

and synergy with other injuries from, for example, gastric acid. Concerning oesophageal cancer, 25-68% are attributable to alcohol consumption where consumption of more than 160 g alcohol per day (recommended daily guidelines are below 30g) increases the risk by 10-fold, and 80% of cases are preventable by abstinence from both alcohol and cigarette smoking. Poor diet and oral hygiene are also co-risk factors.

Of all lifestyle factors related to cancer, alcohol is a modest attributable risk at 4-6%, while the attributable risk for cigarette smoking is approximately 30% and that for diet is 20-50% (Doll et al. 1998).

In Australia, colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of death from cancer in women (after breast cancer) and men (after lung cancer); it usually develops from a small benign growth or adenoma in the mucosa of the colon or rectum. There is inconsistent evidence, however, directly linking alcohol consumption to colorectal cancer (Kune and Vietta 1992, Potter et al. 1996). For example, while a Swedish population-based study did not observe an increase risk of colorectal cancer overall or at specific anatomical sites in alcoholics followed for 25 years (Ye et al. 2003), a French case-controlled study did observe a relationship between alcoholism and the risk of adenomas and colorectal cancer (Bardou et al. 2002), where alcohol promotes the growth of the adenoma and hence promotes colorectal carcinogenesis. A six-year Canadian population-based study also observed an increased risk of colorectal cancer in men, particularly for the distal colon and rectum (Sharpe et al. 2002). When the type of beverage was considered in this study, beer showed the strongest association with colorectal cancer while wine showed the weakest association. Indeed, some other studies that also observed a link between alcohol consumption and colorectal cancer, also observed beverage specific effects on the risk colorectal cancer. A recently published study by Pederson et al. (2003)

has drawn similar conclusions to that drawn by Stemmermann et al. (1990), Kune et al. (1992), Goldbohm et al. (1994) and Hsing et al (1998). These five studies suggest that while beer consumption clearly increases the risk of colorectal cancer, the association is less clear for wine and spirits. Furthermore, the 14-year Danish population-based study observed that while alcohol, and in particular, beer consumption significantly increased the risk of rectal cancer, the risk appeared to be reduced when wine was consumed (Pedersen et al. 2003). The components of wine most likely to be responsible for an anti-carcinogenic effect are phenolic compounds. Resveratrol, for example, has been observed to depress the growth of colorectal aberrant crypt foci in rats (Schneider et al. 2000) and anthocyanins have been observed to inhibit the growth of human colon cancer cells (Kamei et al. 1998).

In all the studies cited above the amount of alcohol consumed also correlated with the risk of colorectal cancer (Munoz et al. 1998), but the level of alcohol consumption that increases the risk has not been determined and there are usually other risk factors for cancer that confound determination (Longnecker 1995). For example, it has been suggested that alcohol consumption and folate deficiency have a synergistic action in the promotion of colorectal cancer, particularly in alcoholics who have a low intake of folate (Giovannucci et al. 1998, Su et al. 2001). Flood et al. (2002), however, did not observe an increased risk of colorectal cancer with combinations of high alcohol consumption and low folate intake; folate is involved in the synthesis and methylation of DNA.

A number of mechanisms have been suggested for the potential carcinogenic effects of alcohol on the colon and rectum. For example, colorectal cancer may occur from the altered metabolism of genotoxic compounds in the liver,

such as nitrosamines, by alcohol (Swann et al. 1984, Hakkak et al. 1996), as alcohol can either induce or suppress the liver's microsomal monooxygenase (metabolizing) system. Beer and spirits can contain nitrosamines. In addition, acetaldehyde, which is the first metabolite or breakdown product of alcohol, has been classified as a carcinogen in animals by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. In saliva, the digestive tract and colon, the further breakdown of acetaldehyde to acetate is limited (Salaspuro 1996). Consequently, these areas generally have a high localised concentration of acetaldehyde. This concentration is even higher in heavy consumers of alcohol, who have been shown to be at greater risk of developing cancers of the mouth, digestive tract and colon.

Recent epidemiological studies also suggest that the risk of alcohol-associated digestive tract cancers is significantly increased in Asian alcoholics who have the inactive aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH₂) enzyme (Yokoyama et al. 1998) and in Caucasian alcoholics who have the very active alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH₃¹) enzyme, where both population groups have a higher concentration of acetaldehyde in their saliva, digestive tract and colon for a longer period of time than the general population. Indeed these studies imply that acetaldehyde may be a local and topical carcinogen in humans.

In summary, this recent research suggests that there may be a casual relationship between alcohol consumption and colorectal cancer, especially for heavy and excessive consumers of alcoholic beverages such as beer, although any effect of alcohol on carcinogenesis appears to be indirect. This research also suggests that the moderate consumption of wine may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.

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Moderate Drinkers earn more

A new survey issued by a team of economists at Scotland's, Stirling University counters claims that drinking costs society between \$30 - \$60 billion a year due to drinking in the work place and lost productivity.

The researchers followed more than 17,000 men and women born in 1958. Their progress into adulthood was charted through regular interviews about different aspects of their lives. Compared with abstainers, it was found that moderate-drinking employees who joined colleagues for a drink were more likely to get promotions in their jobs and earn more money because drinking together builds trust and friendships that allowed for easy networking with superiors as well as fellow workers.

On average the moderate drinkers earned 17% more than tee-total colleagues. Heavier drinkers (defined as men drinking >50 units of alcohol per week and women who drink > 35 units per week) earned less, but still more than teetotalers. Professor David Bell states "The survey shows you don't want to be a teetotaler. People who drink moderately seem to earn more." The findings were welcomed by the Campaign for Real Ale's Mike Benner, who said: "Drinking in pubs breaks down lots of social barriers. It's part of our culture and always has been". But Alcohol Concern said: "Some professions and firms have a very strong drinking culture and this may explain the results".

Too Good to be true?

Scientist, Dr. Weal Badawy, an electrical engineer at Canada's Calgary University, claimed in August, to have invented the perfect headache tablet to cure hangovers. The tablet, the Intelligent Pill or iPill (the size of a 5p piece and should cost no more than 7p), contains sensors which measure body temperature and acidity levels. A tiny microchip then

calculates how much medicine is required by the patient and then the micropumps dispenses the required dose.

The iPill could be programmed to release other cures, such as vitamins or anti-acids, through the day. Dr. Badawy said of the iPill: "It is all completely safe. It will come out in the bathroom in the usual way."

Abdominal Fat, Alcohol Drinking Pattern and Heart Disease Risk

Drinking pattern and beverage type can influence the risk of heart disease by affecting the accumulation of abdominal fat, a body characteristic shown to be an important risk factor for cardiovascular diseases according to epidemiologists from the University at Buffalo.

The study, by Professor Dorn et al published in the Journal of Nutrition reports that men and women who drank infrequently but heavily had more abdominal fat or “central adiposity,” as measured by abdominal height, than people who consumed the same amount but drank regularly.

The type of alcohol consumed appeared to contribute differently to the accumulation of abdominal fat. Wine drinkers showed the lowest abdominal height, while liquor drinkers had the highest. Beer as an alcohol source wasn't associated with central adiposity. In addition, current drinkers, those who had consumed alcohol within the past 30 days, had lower abdominal height than both men and women abstainers.

Dorn conducted the study in 2,343 men and women selected aged 35 to 79 who had never been treated for heart disease so could serve as healthy controls in the Western New York Health Study, a series of case-control studies that examine alcohol drinking patterns and chronic disease risk.

Researchers collected information on alcohol consumption during the past 30 days, covering beverage type, total grams of alcohol, drinking intensity (number of drinks consumed per drinking day), drinking frequency and drinking with or without food. Categories of frequency were: lifetime abstainers, non-current drinkers (no alcohol for 30 days) and current drinkers. Other lifestyle habits-smoking, physical activity, diet, disease prevalence, prescription drug use were recorded. Analysis of the variables showed that small amounts of alcohol consumed on a regular basis were associated with the smallest abdominal heights, while participants who drank sporadically but intensely-more than 3-4 drinks per drinking occasion-had the highest measures. However, within all categories of drinking frequency, the number of drinks mattered. In both men and women, the more drinks per drinking day, the higher the abdominal measurement, results showed. **“These findings support what has been shown in other studies about the beneficial effect of moderate drinking on heart disease,”** said Dorn. **“It also is more evidence that the way people drink is important, and not just the amount of alcohol consumed.”**

SOURCE: Dorn JM et al. Alcohol Drinking Patterns Differentially Affect Central Adiposity as Measured by Abdominal Height in Women & Men. J Nutr 2003;133:2655-62.

Women ‘suffer worse hangovers’

A study by the University of Missouri-Columbia has found hangovers affect women more than men. Subjects were 1,230 drinking US undergraduate students - After excessive drinking, the students were asked to grade how acutely they were experiencing 13 key symptoms - including headache, vomiting or fatigue. **“This finding makes biological sense, because women tend to weigh less and have lower percentages of total body water than men do, so they should achieve higher degrees of intoxication and, presumably, more hangover per unit of alcohol,”** said Wendy Slutske, an

associate professor of psychology who led the research. The most common of the symptoms reported was dehydration. Medically speaking, it is dehydration that is responsible for most of the nasty effects. Alcohol is a diuretic, and speeds up the loss of water from the body. Nausea, vomiting, and indigestion are caused by the direct action of alcohol irritating the stomach lining. Students suffered a hangover 3 -11 times a year. **“For most of them it occurs rarely enough that it is unlikely to have a major deleterious impact on academic performance,”** Dr Slutske said.

UK Strategy unit focus on binge-drinking

A UK Strategy Unit Interim Report on alcohol harm has named the UK as ‘Europe’s binge drinking capital’. Minister Hazel Blears said that along with a calculated cost of £7.2bn in terms of crime and disorder and £1.2bn in health issues, thousands of days of productivity were lost to drinking related illnesses. The report also acknowledges, however, that most people drink responsibly and that moderate drinking helps prevent 22,000 deaths every year due to its cardiovascular protection.

Blears believes young people need more education on alcohol. She added that education and prevention were going to be a big part of the policy.

Re-enforcing the issues of patterns of drinking, the research company NFO has found that nearly half of all the alcohol bought across the bar in Britain is sold on Friday and Saturday nights. Less than a third is consumed on mid-week nights and Sunday evenings with the rest being drunk at lunch times, another declining market. In terms of expenditure, the Irish are the EU’s keenest purchasers of alcohol and tobacco, considering annual household spending (Eurostat) with spending 6% of their income on alcohol and tobacco in 2001 and 2000. Second were the Finns, 5.5%, and Denmark third, 4.6% with Britain at 4.1%.

Jean Coussins of the Portman Group said that the drinks industry is just part of the solution to alcohol misuse. **“What is needed now is action. The Government should develop mass media campaigns to curb excessive drinking, funded at the same level as drink-drive campaigns over the years... The reality is, as the Government analysis acknowledges, is that most people in the UK drink moderately. Glamourising drunkenness does no one any favours”**

The report precedes the government’s alcohol strategy, which is due within the next few months.

Violent Crime, Smoking and heavy drinking Among US Teens on Decline

In 2001, there were 72.6 million children in the US, comprising 25% of the population and down from a high of 36% in 1964. In 2000, 64% of U.S. children were White, non-Hispanic, 16 % were Hispanic, 15 % were Black, non-Hispanic, 4% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% were American Indian/Alaska native. The percentage of children living with at least one parent who was foreign-born was 20% in 2002, up from 15 % in 1999.

The government report, compiled by the Federal Inter Agency Forum on Child and Family Statistics on America's children shows that violent crime, smoking, and heavy drinking among U.S. teenagers are all on the decline. However, more children are overweight than ever. "Contrary to what many people may think, the Nation's children are faring better in many respects than they have in previous years," said Duane Alexander, M.D., Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "The report provides an accurate snap shot of our children,

showing areas where strong gains have been made, and where we need to remain vigilant. "Most people, about two-thirds, believe that crime is going up among America's children, the picture painted by this report, based on actual data, paints the opposite picture."

According to the report released by the National Institutes of Health, the Census Bureau, and other agencies, victims reported 413,000 juvenile crimes in 2002, which translates into 17 violent crimes per 1,000 juveniles age 12 to 17. "This is a 67% drop from the 1993 high, and the lowest rate recorded since the national victimization survey began in 1973," the report stated.

It also found that fewer children are being killed by guns. Last year, firearms were involved in 19% of deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds. Exposure to second-hand smoke also fell, and fewer teens smoked. As recently as 1994, 88 % of children ages 4 to 11 were exposed to second-hand smoke. The latest report found that rate had dropped to 64%. Daily smoking

by youth dropped to the lowest rate since 1975, and heavy drinking among teens also declined.

The health section of this year's report introduces a new indicator on overweight. The proportion of children ages 6 to 18 that were overweight increased from 6% in 1976-1980 to 11% in 1988-1994 to 15% in 1999-2000. The report added that Black, non-Hispanic girls and Mexican American boys are at particularly high risk of being overweight.

The number of teens who smoke cigarettes daily dropped to the lowest point since data were first collected in 1975, to 5% of eighth graders, 10 % of tenth graders, and 17% of twelfth graders. Moreover, the percentage of 10th graders who reported episodes of heavy drinking declined from 25% in 2001 to 22 % in 2002. Heavy drinking is defined as 5 or more drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks. In addition, among tenth graders, illicit drug use in the past 30 days declined from 23% in 2001 to 21 % in 2002.

Research on under age drinking by the Century Council

Three surveys commissioned by the Century Council on underage drinking, have found that parents and friends are the key source of alcohol to under age drinkers in the US.

The surveys, released in August, of more than 1,000 kids under 18 and 1,600 parents found that two-thirds of the children and more than half their parents agreed that the main source of alcohol for underage drinkers came from family and friends, although the parents tended to report that they were not providing alcohol. "We don't absolve the industry of responsibility for preventing underage drinking, but the parents play a major role and need to understand that this is where access is taking place," says Ralph S. Blackman, president of the Century Council, a non-profit group that conducted the surveys as part of a national public awareness program to combat underage drinking.

For the surveys, children ages 10 to 18 and adults, including 700 with children under age 18, responded through the Internet or by telephone. Among the kids, only 1% of 10-12 year olds reported drinking, compared with 23% of 13-15 year olds and 35% of 16-18 year olds. Among those who did drink, 65 % said they got alcoholic drinks from family and friends-either from older siblings or friends, by taking it from their home or a friend's home without permission or by having parents who allowed them to drink.

From the parents' perspective, 53% agreed that friends and family were the main source of alcohol. However, Blackman says, the parents rarely took responsibility for kids' access to alcoholic beverages. "They will acknowledge that it's somebody down the block, or a friend's parents ... On an individual basis, it never starts at home." When asked

about other ways to get alcohol, parents and children had different responses. For instance, 7 % of the children reported that they got alcohol from a store or bar that doesn't check ID's, while 18% of the parents thought that was a source for alcohol. About 5% of the children reported getting liquor from a stranger, by asking someone to buy them beer, for instance, while 10% of the parents listed that as a means of access. Only 3% of children reported successful use of fake ID's to get alcohol, but 19% of their parents blamed fake ID's for kids' access to alcohol.

The aim of the program was simply to raise parental awareness, Blackman says. He says parents need to "be a good role model in terms of their own consumption and behaviour, identify bad behaviour, like kids not getting up in the morning or having their grades slip, and supervise them."

Gene May be Linked to Binge-Drinking

Researchers have uncovered a genetic factor that could predispose certain youths to binge drinking, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

College students with a particular variant of the serotonin-transporter gene (5-HTT) drank more alcohol per occasion, drank more often just to get drunk, and were more likely to engage in binge drinking than students without the variant. The research was based on interviews with 262 college students, ages 17 to 23, about their alcohol consumption. The team of scientists then analysed the genetic profiles of the participants. The 5-HTT gene is involved in recycling the chemical serotonin after it is secreted into the synapse of a cell. Rather than having one long and one short variant of the serotonin transporter gene, study participants found to be predisposed to harmful drinking behaviour had duplicate copies of the short version.. **“This research provides important new evidence that the risk of developing a maladaptive pattern of alcohol consumption is influenced by genetically determined neurobiological differences that exert their effects during young adulthood,”** said Ting-Kai Li, M.D., director of NIAAA.

Source: Herman AI et al. SEROTONIN TRANSPORTER PROMOTER POLYMORPHISM AND DIFFERENCES IN ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR IN A COLLEGE STUDENT POPULATION. *Alcohol and Alcoholism* 2003;38:446-9.

TIRF Ignition Interlock Symposium

TIRF will host its annual Ignition Interlock Symposium on Oct 28th in Hilton Head South Carolina. The one-day conference will explore the latest developments in ignition interlock programs, service delivery and legislative issues. The registration fee is \$150.00 US. To register for symposium and obtain more information go to www.ignitioninterlocksymposium.com.

Resveratrol shown to mimic calorie restriction

Molecules found in red wine, peanuts and other products of the plant world have for the first time been shown to mimic the life-extending effects of calorie restriction, a finding that could help researchers develop drugs that lengthen life and prevent or treat aging-related diseases.

Resveratrol, was shown in a study to extend the life span of yeast cells by up to 70%. Howitz et al report the discovery of three classes of small molecules that activate sirtuins, showing that the potent activator resveratrol, a polyphenol found in red wine, lowers the Michaelis constant of SIRT1 for both the acetylated substrate and NAD⁺, and increases cell survival by stimulating SIRT1-dependent deacetylation of p53. In yeast, resveratrol mimics calorie restriction by stimulating Sir2, increasing DNA stability and extending life-span by 70%. The researchers discuss possible evolutionary origins of this phenomenon and suggest new lines of research into the therapeutic use of sirtuin activators. David Sinclair, an assistant professor of pathology at Harvard Medical School, said he and his fellow researchers hope the molecules will prove to prolong life not just in yeast but in multi-cellular organisms like worms, fruit flies and, perhaps, humans.

Sinclair said the study may help explain why moderate consumption of red wine has been linked to lower incidence of heart disease and why resveratrol prevents cancer in mice. Scientists know that putting organisms on a calorie-restricted diet reduces the incidence of age-related illnesses such as cancer, osteoporosis and heart disease. In the 1990s, research showed that single genes can control how fast organisms age. Scientists have been racing to find ways of manipulating those genes by finding molecules that activate the enzymes that in turn influence the genes that regulate aging. Sinclair's team screened thousands of molecules to see which ones might activate the enzymes. They found a group of 18 molecules, resveratrol being just one, and all of them came from plants

and were produced in response to harsh environmental conditions like drought. To illustrate that theory, Sinclair noted that red wines from regions with harsher growing conditions- Spain, Chile, Argentina and Australia- contain more resveratrol than those produced where grapes are not highly stressed or dehydrated.

Professor R. Curtis Ellison comments ‘We have a huge amount of direct data in humans on the effects of alcohol and wine in preventing disease, especially the diseases associated with aging, such as heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, and Alzheimer’s Disease. If anyone wants to base public policy on research, it should at least be based on studies in humans (not studies in worms, fruit flies, and mould!). The vast amount of interest in this paper is because it raises the possibility that some companies can isolate a single substance from wine (or other matter) and make a big profit from putting it into a capsule.

I believe that there are probably hundreds of active substances in wine other than resveratrol that have healthy properties. And it is probably the resveratrol in conjunction with many other substances, especially the alcohol, that will turn out to be the healthiest “drug” we should be taking. St. Leger, Cochrane and Moore published a classic paper in 1979 describing the inverse association between the average per capita wine consumption of a country and its mortality rates of coronary disease (*Lancet* 1979;1:1017-1020). These authors ended their paper by stating: **“If wine is ever found to contain a constituent protective against I.H.D. (ischemic heart disease, or coronary disease) then we would consider it almost a sacrilege that this constituent would be isolated. The medicine is already in a highly palatable form.”**

SOURCE: Howitz KT et al. Small molecule activators of sirtuins extend *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* lifespan. *Nature* 2003.

Book review: Trends in Mortality Attributable to Current Alcohol Consumption in East and West Germany

In 2000 the ILSI Europe Alcohol Task Force initiated a meta-analysis on mortality attributable to current alcohol consumption.

A number of regions in Europe were screened for the study, the first from the exercise having been published in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2001: Vol. 56, No.6 pp383-388). Now, a second study from this activity has been published in the *Social Science and Medicine* (2003;56:1385-1395).

It describes trends in mortality attributable to current alcohol consumption in East and West Germany. There is increasing awareness of alcohol

as a cause of the persisting health divide between eastern and western Germany.

Taking into account both the adverse and beneficial effects of alcohol, this study quantifies the burden of alcohol attributable mortality in 2 parts of Germany in the 1990's.

Including the cardio-protective effect of alcohol, there were 1.4% more deaths among men aged 20+ in 1992 in Germany than would have been expected in a non-drinking population, while there were 0.1% fewer deaths among women.

By 1997, this had increased to 1.8% excess male deaths and 0.1% excess female deaths. In 1997 alcohol 'caused'

9.0% of all the east German men compared with 5.6% in the west (women east: 2.5% women west 2.2%) At the same time alcohol 'prevented' 5.5% deaths in east German men compared with 4.3% in the west, while there were 2.9% and 2.0% fewer deaths in women.

It was concluded that mortality attributable to alcohol contributes considerably to overall mortality and to east-west gap in Germany. The study points to the need for comprehensive policies on alcohol in Germany to close the persisting east-west gap.

For copies, please contact ILSI via: Publications@ilsieurope.be or visit the website via: www.europe.ilsa.org

New cholesterol fighter found in red wine

Scientists at the University of California, Davis, presenting at the American Chemical Society annual meeting claim to have identified another group of chemicals in red wine that is linked to the ability to lower cholesterol. Saponins are glucose-based plant compounds have been found in an increasing number of foods. This is the first time they've been found in wine, according to Andrew Waterhouse, Ph.D., Professor of Enology at UC Davis.

Saponins could be as important as resveratrol. The compounds are believed to come from the waxy skin of grapes. To better understand their distribution in wine, Waterhouse conducted a preliminary study of six varieties of California wines "Average dietary saponin intake has been estimated at 15 mg, while one glass of red has a total saponin concentration of about half that, making red wine a significant dietary source," commented Waterhouse. In general, Waterhouse found that red wine contains significantly higher saponin levels than white < about three to ten times as much.

Among the red wines tested, red Zinfandel contained the highest levels. Syrah next, followed by Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon, which had about the same amount. The white varieties tested, Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay, contained much less. Although Merlot was not analysed in this study, Waterhouse believes it contains significant amounts of saponins at levels comparable to the other red wines.

While resveratrol is thought to block cholesterol oxidation by its antioxidant action, saponins are believed to work by binding to and preventing the absorption of cholesterol. Saponins are known to affect inflammation pathways, an effect that could have implications in heart disease and cancer, according to published studies.

Besides wine, other foods containing significant amounts of saponins include olive oil and soybeans. For the most part, saponins make up the waxy coating of these plants, where they function primarily for protection.

Red Wine and Smoking

Unpublished research presented by John Lekakis and Christos Papamichael of University Hospital in Athens at the annual meeting of the European Society of Cardiology in September claims there are enough beneficial chemicals in two glasses of red wine to suspend the harmful effect that smoking one cigarette has on the functioning of arteries. That does not prove regular red wine drinking can counteract the harm of chronic smoking, they emphasise.

The scientists used a Greek red wine on 16 healthy volunteers. It is suggested that wine polyphenols block production of endothelin-1 which causes blood vessels to contract, increasing blood pressure and the danger of a heart attack.

One cigarette, smoked intensively, was enough to damage arterial function for up to an hour afterwards, An intake of polyphenols at the same time counteracted that effect. They established that alcohol was not the cause of the beneficial effect by testing an alcohol-free version, which worked just as well.

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