



APRIL 2012 NEWSLETTER

Alcohol Awareness Month: Preventing alcohol's devastating impact on men

At a recent court hearing, family and friends of a man killed by a drunk driver devised a unique way to honor his memory. They all wore t-shirts with a quote that reflected his life. It said: "That a man is successful who has lived well, laughed often and loved much." The victim, a technology engineer, left behind two children and a wife. The male perpetrator was sentenced to prison. And thus, a community lost two men to something that might have been prevented.

Last year, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a report with startling findings: harmful drinking results in about 2.5 million deaths each year. In fact, nearly 4 percent of deaths worldwide are attributed to it - greater than deaths caused by HIV/AIDS, violence or tuberculosis, according to the report. And it is a causal factor in 60 types of diseases and injuries.

The WHO stressed that "harmful alcohol use is a particularly grave threat to men across the globe," noting that:

- It is the leading risk factor for death among males ages 15 to 59, due largely to injuries, violence and cardiovascular diseases.
- Six percent of male deaths are attributable to alcohol, compared with 1.1 percent of female deaths.
- Men outnumber women four to one in weekly episodes of heavy drinking.

In the United States, about 79,000 deaths are attributable to excessive alcohol use each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and men consistently have higher rates of alcohol-related deaths and hospitalizations than women.

The cost of excessive alcohol consumption in the United States in 2006 reached \$223.5 billion, according to a CDC

Study released last year. The costs largely resulted from losses in workplace productivity (72 percent of the total cost). This impacts our ability to compete in the global marketplace.

Unfortunately, **our popular culture portrays heavy drinking as part of masculinity:** it is necessary for bonding, for "scoring" with women, for popularity and for bravado. The men who lose jobs, get women pregnant, end up in jail, lose their driver's license, or kill someone after a night of high risk drinking are rarely mentioned.

But the greatest tragedy is that we could have prevented much of this devastation!



Despite alcohol's extraordinary global toll, it gets remarkably little public policy attention, the WHO noted in its Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health.

The WHO stressed that **many evidence-based alcohol policies and prevention programs have proved effective at reducing the health, safety and socioeconomic problems of alcohol abuse.**

In the U.S., these policies do not represent radical change. Instead, they reinforce the effective state-based regulatory measures we currently have in most states. Unfortunately, **there are strong forces calling for deregulation for the sake of lower prices, greater customer convenience, and greater government revenue.**

These deregulation proposals should be viewed with great skepticism. First, the revenue projections are often overblown and may not materialize. Second, there needs to be a discussion of the public safety impact for any

regulatory change. This should include a review of public health recommendations such as the CDC's Task Force on Community Prevention. This is an independent body of public health experts who conduct a rigorous review of research to determine the effectiveness of alcohol policies. Based on such reviews they have recommended that states retain limits on the number of places that sell alcohol and the hours and days of sale. They recently recommended against efforts to privatize state "control systems" because it invariably increases the availability of alcohol.

While people like low prices, cheap alcohol invariably brings problems. In fact, an exhaustive review of 112 studies by the University of Florida found that price increases can actually reduce problems. Our US alcohol regulatory systems usually try to balance prices using a variety of measures: taxes, requirements for wholesalers to sell at the same price to all retailers and prohibitions against aggressive promotions such as using alcohol as a loss leader. **A comprehensive approach can avoid the problem experienced in the United Kingdom where tax increases have not increased the price to the customer because the large grocery retailers pass the tax back to the supplier.** This is why the UK is currently discussing a requirement for minimum prices.

Implementing and enforcing legal drinking ages for buying and consuming alcohol helps reduce alcohol-attributable problems. Setting maximum blood alcohol concentrations for drivers and enforcing them with sobriety checkpoints and random breath tests reduce drunk driving.

By ignoring the issue of alcohol regulation, we risk losing more of our young men to drunk driving, violence, job loss and victimization. A strong alcohol regulatory system that fosters moderation and balances our marketplace can go a long way to reducing tragedies to our families and communities.

UK update report to be available in May

In September, 2009, "The Danger of Alcohol Deregulation: The United Kingdom Experience," was released. This report documented the alcohol epidemic that followed five decades of alcohol deregulation in the UK. Have things changed since then? In May, a brief update report will be released to examine UK efforts to quell the epidemic and to review the possibility that the US may experience a similar epidemic.

Healthy Alcohol Market website has been upgraded!

Check out the campaign website! It has recently been upgraded to improve its appearance and ease of navigation. And, further upgrades are planned for the future.

For more information, see www.healthyalcoholmarket.com

or

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