

## *Alcohol, Ethics & Society-Daily Summary*

**THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2002**

### **RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**

*(9:00am to 12:30pm)*

The second day of the conference continued the attempt to establish an ethical framework for alcohol policy development. Addressing the role of research and education, the morning session posed some critical questions:

*When it comes to research, does the source of funding always create bias?  
Who has the responsibility to educate the public about the “good” and “bad” aspects of drinking?*

Chairing the session was Mr. Graeme Willersdorf, Senior Vice President for Corporate Affairs at Foster’s Group and Chairman of ICAP’s Board of Directors. This session, said Mr. Willersdorf, is an extension of the work already done by the sponsoring organizations in the area of research and education, particularly the *Dublin Principles* and the *Geneva Partnership on Alcohol: Towards a Global Charter*. These two consensus documents addressing the issues of research and education can be found on the ICAP website.

### **“Approaches to Primary Prevention of Alcohol Use: Research and Ethical Questions”**

Dr. Mark Morgan, Head of the Education Department of St. Patrick’s College of Education in Dublin and a founding member of the ESPAD study on alcohol, reviewed a range of approaches to prevent alcohol problems among young people that have been applied in many countries around the world. The basic dichotomy in approaches that are implemented in schools lies the choice of reducing demand versus reducing supply. According to Dr. Morgan, while the former has shown but modest success, the latter holds considerable promise as an effective tool.

School education programs, said Dr. Morgan, can be effective under certain circumstances: where there is active participation by the learners, those at whom the program is directed; where there is understanding of the social influences that are at work; where parental influences are involved; where there is an emphasis on health, not on punitive measure; where the program is an integral part of the curriculum.

However, “(o)ne major conclusion is that no policy can be effective unless it is accompanied by enforcement and there is awareness on the part of the intended targets of both the policy and the enforcement efforts.”

### **“Campus-Community Collaboration – A Practical Approach to Curbing Alcohol Abuse on Campus”**

Bringing with him the experience from university campuses on the other side of the Atlantic, Dr. Peter Cressy, President and CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS), reviewed the problem of alcohol misuse currently facing college administrators and students in that country. The presentation focused on the drinking behavior on university campuses in the United States and examined the dilemma faced by universities in their responsibility for a student body largely under the legal drinking age. Dr. Cressy addressed some of the approaches that have been implemented to solve this dilemma and to change students' drinking behaviors that are associated with harm.

In particular, Dr. Cressy's presentation focused on an industry–campus–community partnership effort that is being carried out in several regions of the United States with considerable success. The “American Campus and Alcohol Conference” involves all relevant sectors at all stages of its execution, from planning to funding. In this approach, all partners involved work in tandem towards a common goal. According to Dr. Cressy, the lessons learned include that “the industry must be at the table and seen as part of the solution”. In addition, it is especially important to “pay attention to dangerous consequences associated with risky and abusive drinking.”

#### **“The Promise of Partnership for Research and Education”**

Adding a different perspective, Dr. John Luik from the Niagara Institute in Canada, examined the three arguments fundamental to the case that is often made against partnerships including the beverage alcohol industry. First, there is the notion that the alcohol industry, on the one hand, and the public health community on the other are each dominated by irreconcilable interests – increased profit versus public good. The second argument is that the industry manipulates the “‘ideological climate’ by an idea and research agenda that is founded on questionable science.” Third, the “essential tension” that ensues makes partnership impracticable.

According to Dr. Luik, these three arguments “present a misconceived debate about the nature of industry science”, ignoring the significant promise partnership holds. Conflicts of interest need not arise exclusively from commercial organizations, but can equally stem from government and other entities with their own agendas. “The public health community's interests are thus not necessarily right, either in part or in whole, they enjoy no privileged status; rather they must be argued for in the same fashion as any other interests.”

Partnerships in the alcohol field require that three principles be respected – a recognition of the benefits of moderate drinking, a focus on the reduction of problematic drinking, and the use of the best available science to determine the root causes of problems.

It is possible for all parties in a partnership to accept each other's core interests, according to Dr. Luik. In fact, disagreement on some core interests need not be an obstacle to agreement on others. In developing such partnerships, “(w) hat starts out as ‘sleeping with the enemy’ may over time lead to setting up a home and having a family.”

### **“Drinking Education: Minimizing Negatives and Optimizing Positives”**

The pleasurable aspects of alcohol consumption have been chronicled over time and across cultures, yet not all cultures view alcohol as a source of pleasure. Focusing on the element of pleasure that often accompanies alcohol consumption, the last presenter in this session, Dr. Stanton Peele, author and addiction expert from the U.S., offered “The Joy of Drinking” as a positive model that can promote successful drinking patterns.

While most people, asked individually about their views of alcohol and its effects, would place pleasure foremost, public health groups place harms foremost, particularly as they relate to young people. Yet, according to Dr. Peele, “ignoring health and pleasure benefits while referring only to the danger and harm associated with alcohol may delay – even permanently impair – people’s ability to adopt sensible and pleasurable drinking practices.” It is therefore important that, as young people learn about drinking, they be taught about both the potential harms and the benefits – physiological and psychological – to be derived from alcohol.

The goal should be to learn moderate drinking. “The development of moderate drinking is both possible and beneficial; it is beneficial for the individual and for those around the person as well as for the society at large. In other words, people should learn as an ethical tenet that excessive drinking and antisocial behavior while drinking is wrong.”

### **ADVERTISING, MARKETING AND SALES**

*(2pm to 3:30pm)*

At the heart of the debate around ethical practices and corporate social responsibility lies the issue of advertising and marketing of consumer products. In relation to alcohol, this debate has broader implications that extend into the realm of public health.

*Is it enough that advertising should be “truthful, honest and decent,” or are higher ethical standards needed for beverage alcohol?  
Who should have the last word?*

The session was chaired by Mr. Jose Domingo Gomez Castallo, Chairman of the European Advertising Standards Authority, who positioned the session within the context of alcohol abuse among young people. This issue, he said, is the collective responsibility of society, however, the industry, too, must accept its share.

### **“Drinking It In: Findings of the Valencia Meeting on Marketing and Promotion of Alcohol to Young People”**

Ms. Leanne Riley, Scientist at the World Health Organization’s Headquarters in Geneva, presented the conclusions and recommendations of a meeting held earlier in 2002 to address the effect of alcohol marketing and advertising on young people around the world. While alcohol advertising is not the sole factor responsible for alcohol misuse among young people, its highly visible role makes it an important one.

Alcohol misuse is a key contributor to morbidity and mortality, and is increasing among young people the world over. The involvement of beverage alcohol advertising, according to Ms. Riley, is an influence on changing beliefs and expectations among young people about drinking, which is generally portrayed in advertising as positive, desirable, and the norm in most societies. These portrayals are problematic and make the environment a hostile one to public health messages.

Current responses to marketing – codes, warnings, restrictions and counter-advertising – are inadequate to deal with the new forms of advertising and new products that are on the market and have appeal for young people. WHO has developed recommendations for these issues, which should be implemented in countries around the world. In addition, partnerships and the input of the beverage alcohol industry are to be encouraged. In Ms. Riley's words, WHO's challenge to the industry is that it "can be part of the problem or part of the solution."

### **"Are Alcohol Advertisers Drinking In the Last Chance Saloon?"**

Speaking from three differing perspectives, that of an adman who has spent thirty years in advertising, many of them working on alcohol brands, that of a regulator within the UK's Advertising Standards Authority, and that of a parent of a teenage son, Mr. Hugh Burkitt offered a critique of alcohol advertising in the United Kingdom. While rules on the advertising of alcohol exist, according to Burkitt, they are largely being ignored, particularly on television. The three main issues that need particular attention in this regard are targeting of young drinkers, binge drinking and depictions of sexual success in advertising.

Using examples of existing television commercials to illustrate his point, Mr. Burkitt offered a response to one of the key questions addressed in this session -- higher ethical standards *are* needed for alcohol than the standard rules on truth and decency, for "(a)lcohol brings great pleasure to an enormous number of people. But it is also dangerous, and I would agree with myself – in all three of my roles – that young people, in particular, need to learn how to drink it sensibly."

### **"Alcohol Advertising and Promotions: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly?"**

Professor Ann Roche, Director of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction at Flinders University in Australia, discussed the contentious field of alcohol advertising and the disparate and often adversarial views held on the subject by the beverage alcohol industry and the public health field. The presentation was an attempt to lay the groundwork for what constitutes good and bad, or inappropriate, advertising, as well as responsible consumption and discussed the ambivalence that bedevils both its consumption and its advertising and promotion.

Using examples, Prof. Roche illustrated both the good and the bad, the responsible and irresponsible in alcohol advertising. New products whose packaging or delivery raises concerns regarding responsible serving and consumption were highlighted. Another area for particular concern, according to the speaker, includes the sale, promotion and

distribution of beverage alcohol through the internet. However, there also exists a large body of advertising that is acceptable from a public health perspective. Many of these “depict images that reflect low risk drinking patterns, place drinking in the context of eating food, or, more specifically, consuming good quality food with good quality alcohol.”

Prof. Roche concluded her remarks with an assessment of the current state of advertising of beverage alcohol. In its efforts, she said, the industry is misreading today’s culture and pushing the envelope beyond acceptable limits of taste. The limit to advertising is clearly marked around several “hands-off” areas – youth, the objectification of women, sex, risky behavior, and sports.

### **“Setting the Standards for Responsible Consumer Marketing”**

The final presentation in the session was delivered by Mr. Chris Britton, Global Marketing Director for Diageo plc. In an overview of marketing practice in general, Mr. Britton stressed the role of the consumer in driving the market. Marketing, he said, is based on insight into the values, attitudes and preferences of consumers. In the alcohol field, as in others, it is consumers who drive the business.

However, “great brands have to be produced and marketed to the highest standards of social acceptability and responsibility.” This tenet must lie at the very core of the advertising and marketing process. In setting the standards for responsible marketing, Diageo has pledged to take a leading role towards developing the concept of “drinking well”. Responsible consumer marketing, he said, should not be a constraint, but a positive driver linked to company performance and the creation of the educated consumer.

As a demonstration of this commitment, Mr. Britton announced publicly that Diageo has signed on to the U.N. Global Compact on corporate social responsibility, making it the first drinks company to do so. Yet at the end of the day, it should be borne in mind that “(j)ust as the brand owner must market responsibly, so the consumer has a responsibility to drink responsibly.”