The UK Chief Medical Officer recently revised its guidelines for alcohol drinking (2016, January 8th). They... quality of life. So by drinking less alcohol you can live more - both physically and psychologically.

The core messages for the previous these health campaigns were simple statements or mantras: smoking causes cancer, drunk driving kills. We need a similar health message for alcohol drinking. Hence our following suggestion: ‘Alcohol: Drink Less and Live More’. It is simple and general, and like many broad statements it has multiple meanings. In physical terms, it indicates health benefits and longer life expectancy [6]. It promises less liver disease, fewer cancers, and many other medical gains. Psychologically, it promises fewer personal accidents and self-injuries, less interpersonal violence and aggression. Other benefits would include fewer unwanted pregnancies, fewer rapes, a reduction in alcohol-related crimes and prison incarcerations. In terms of ‘positive psychology’, it promises more enjoyment and greater happiness. In a recent pilot study from the University of Brighton and its Students’ Union Partnership [7], not only was self-reported alcohol consumption markedly reduced, but those who took part in non-alcohol-focused events reported having a more enjoyable evening. Small amounts of alcohol can facilitate social interactions, and it is when larger amounts are taken that the problems occur [8-10]. Hence a core aim should be to encourage the ‘continental’ mode of drinking. Another related aim could be to encourage the overall benefits of a zero-alcohol lifestyle. Finally, this message needs to be part of a comprehensive overall campaign [11,12].

Currently there are many small initiatives to reduce alcohol usage, but on their own they can generate comparatively slight effects. Hence a comprehensive multi-component programme is needed. Education also needs to be given repeatedly in order to be maximally effective, so that any programme needs to be enduring, with long-term funding. The overall programme could have sub-campaigns specifically targeted towards different age groups. The National Union of Students has agreed a broad initiative [1], which UK universities can incorporate in to their individual initiation programmes for first years students (viz: sophomores in USA). The effectiveness of multi-component packages can be illustrated by the anti-smoking programme initiated by the Uruguay Government in 2005. Their comprehensive programme included an increase in tobacco taxes, a complete ban on advertising, graphic pictograms of smoking-diseases on every cigarette packet, and free medical treatment for nicotine dependence. Over a 6 year period this programme led to a ‘substantial, unprecedented decrease in tobacco use’, with national daily cigarette use reducing by 25.3%, while the decrease was even greater amongst the young [13]. Similar multi-component packages are currently needed for alcohol. They could be facilitated by the simple mantra: ‘Alcohol: Drink Less and Live More’.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

References


