

Moderate wine drinking reduces all cause mortality

Alexander Dorozynski, *Paris*

Drinking three glasses of wine a day reduces the risk of death from all causes by about 30%, according to the first prospective study on the health effects of moderate drinking, which was carried out in France. Mortality from cardiovascular disease was reduced by 35% and from cancer by 20%.

The study included 34 000 men aged 40-60 years who had received a complete health checkup between 1978 and 1983 in Nancy, a town in eastern France. This group was re-evaluated in 1993, by which time 2642 of the group had died, the cause of death having been identified in 1529 (*Epidemiology* 1998;9:1-5).

Age, education, smoking habits, systolic pressure, total cholesterol concentrations, body mass index, physical activity, and drinking habits were all noted, but the drinking habit turned out to be the best indicator of

increased longevity. Mortality was lowest among men drinking two to three glasses of wine a day. A glass was judged to contain 120 ml of wine, equivalent to about 10-12 g of pure alcohol. Death from coronary and cardiovascular disease was reduced by 35% for those who drank two to three glasses of wine (about 22-32 g of alcohol) daily and by 30% for those who drank three to five glasses. Although smokers were at greater risk of cardiovascular disease than non-smokers, those who drank also benefited from the 30% risk reduction.

The leader of the study, Dr Serge Renaud, professor of cardiology at the University of Bordeaux and a member of the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM), said that the diminished cardiovascular risk associated with moderate wine drinking is not counterbalanced



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by increased risk of any other type. However, the risk of death from cardiovascular disease increased sharply for smokers who are heavy drinkers: shooting up to 380% for smokers who drank two bottles of wine (about 140 g of alcohol) a day.

The risk of death from cancer is diminished by 22% for those who drank two glasses of wine daily, with no reduction in risk above four glasses. On the whole, mortality from all causes

was reduced by about 30% for men drinking two to three glasses of wine a day, and by 24% for those drinking three to four glasses. The risk remained lowered for men drinking up to seven glasses of wine a day but increased above that. The correlation did not seem to be altered by physical exercise. Most of the men in the group were wine drinkers, and wine represented 82% of alcohol consumption. □

Marketing of antipsychotic drugs attacked

Deborah Josefson, *San Francisco*

Drug companies in the United States are facing criticism for advertising psychotropic drugs directly to the general public and to patients. One drug company is even offering university scholarships to schizophrenic patients who switch to their new antipsychotic drug.

Last August the Food and Drug Administration changed the rules to allow advertisers to market drugs directly to the public, as long as they provided adequate information about a drug's indications and side effects, or the advertisement directed the consumer to where this information could be found. Consumers in the United States are now deluged with glossy pharmaceutical advertisements in magazines, on television, and on the internet.

Eli Lilly has been inviting schizophrenic patients to switch

over to its new antipsychotic drug, Zyprexa (danzapine), and offering university scholarships for those who do. The campaign was criticised for pressuring doctors to prescribe Zyprexa and for unduly raising the hopes of people with schizophrenia, as most of them cannot cope with the stresses of higher education. Interestingly, a similar scholarship offer by Eli Lilly for students with insulin dependent diabetes did not require the patient to be taking a Lilly product. Aggressive marketing of Zyprexa seems to have paid off as the new drug grossed \$550m (£343m) in its first year of sales.

Eli Lilly also sponsors a "psychoeducational" campaign for schizophrenic patients, which provides educational material and a social structure for patients and their families. Visitors to the Janssen pharmaceutical internet website are invited to register for drug updates, and people with schizophrenia who take Janssen's drug Risperdal (risperidone) can register for a person to person telephone call to remind them to take their medicine.

While many of these initiatives may be laudable, Dr Sidney

Wolfe of the consumer group Public Citizen warned that mentally ill people often have poor judgment and are therefore particularly vulnerable to advertisements. Manufacturers defend their direct advertisements as educational. Alan Holmer, the president of the pharmaceutical manufacturers association, said: "This is the information age, and more information empowers patients to have more meaningful conversations with their doctors about cures and treatments."

The increase in direct public marketing has also resulted in higher treatment costs to deflect the price of advertising. Dr Sam Ho, the vice president for Pacificare Health Systems, a California based health maintenance organisation estimates that Prozac, the most widely promoted antidepressant drug, costs 50% more than similar, but less advertised drugs in its class.

Prescriptions for antidepressant drugs have also reached record breaking rates in recent years. According to a recent study led by Dr Harold Pincus and reported in *JAMA*, the journal of the American Medical Association, the number of pre-

scriptions for mental health problems rose from 32.7 million to 45.6 million from 1984 to 1994, with the greatest increase occurring for antidepressant drugs. Although it is unclear how much of this increase is due to direct drug marketing, many psychiatrists believe that up to 80% of the antidepressant prescriptions are unwarranted and are prescribed for people who are not clinically depressed. Others have attributed the increase to a greater acceptance of depression as an illness warranting medical attention, with a consequent reduction in stigma. □

Corrections

Vitamin B may reduce risk of heart disease: In the news item (14 February, p 498) it was wrongly stated that vitamin B6 levels of more than 4.6 µg a day protects against heart disease. It should have stated 4.6 mg a day.

Doctors to face disciplinary action over Irish hepatitis C scandal: The news item (10 January, p 93) stated that Dr Jack O'Riordan died before the scandal broke. However, he is still alive and took part in the inquiry. The *BMJ* would like to apologise for any distress the error may have caused.