

## National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

I write in response to the consultation currently being undertaken on the above document on behalf of the Sunderland locality of South of Tyne & Wearside Mental Health NHS Trust. Fortunately we were able to have representatives from our relevant services present at the regional event held in Newcastle on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2002. The small group discussions on the questions posed within the document during the event enabled our views to be received and we feel confident that they would have been well represented within the feedback. Subsequently within the Sunderland locality of the Trust, an additional internal consultation process on the document has been facilitated, and received some specific comments on the questions as follows:-

### Question

7. The strategy needs to address all aspects of drinking problems, starting within primary schools in order to ensure a good knowledge base regarding alcohol (and drugs) and effect attitudes towards consumption. Simultaneously prevention needs to be targetted towards adults with the priority attached being comparable to that afforded to illicit drugs and smoking. Focusing on the advertising and marketing of alcohol requires particular attention which may directly effect the current consequences faced by young people especially.
9. There is agreement with focussing on young people but others could be middle aged men (which seems to be a large group) and older people who are often less easily detected.
12. In addition to the factors identified, effects on health and personal relationships are particularly significant and can be very influential in getting the person initially involved with an appropriate agency.
17. In order to be credible within prevention work, which will involve the provision of training, personnel should be trained to Diploma level within a specialist Alcohol course plus have a teaching qualification to ensure they can deliver effectively.
18. Unsure if screening occurs consistently within the Primary Health Care system which would be helpful. This is likely to be a training issue for front line workers as confidence develops with competence based on knowledge, skills and experience. At present, when staff do not feel confident the issue tends to be ignored.
19. Services that can offer a range of specialist interventions would appear to be most helpful to people e.g. Specialist psychotherapists by qualified personnel e.g. Cognitive Therapy and Family/Marital Therapy are particularly useful rather than just counselling, yet not all services have such skilled personnel available.
20. Hopefully we can learn that having health services driven by the Criminal Justice System is not always helpful, thereby enabling services to focus on interventions directly linked to the person's needs/wishes rather than linked to 'social control'.

37. Women, older people and those with disabilities (both learning and sensory) are also particularly vulnerable.
43. The sensible drinking message is not clear to the population at large and is afforded much less attention than the promotion of alcohol which is particularly effectively communicated. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests people perceive conflicting messages e.g. the positive effect of red wine for the heart without the safe limit of units of alcohol for the liver included in the communication, at the same time as 'shock tactics' for drinking and driving campaigns.
50. It would be helpful if there were much tighter regulations relating to alcohol advertising as it seems somewhat out of control in recent years, suggesting the current, almost 'self regulation', is not effective.
51. The profits enjoyed by the alcohol industry are vast and perhaps a significant proportion could be directed into meeting the costs of the health and social consequences of their products, as the 'seized assets' fund for illicit drug use operated.

In addition, a lot of the questions relate to evidence which is widely available within the national and international literature and therefore a very thorough literature review will need to be undertaken to give the final document credibility and thereby facilitate wider acceptance and implementation.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

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