

## Book Reviews

### **Health Issues Related to Alcohol Consumption,**

2nd edn

IAN MACDONALD (Ed.)

Victoria, Australia: Blackwells Science Asia, 1999

459 pp., Price: \$79.50

ISBN 1578810647

This book provides a comprehensive overview of alcohol-related health effects. It is an updated version of the 1993 edition of the same name, by the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI)—Europe. It presents the various health areas in a structured format. Each topic was reviewed by a panel of experts (from Europe and North America), including epidemiologists, clinicians, toxicologists and other biomedical researchers.

An Executive Summary orientates the reader to the health issues covered, which are: moderate drinking, assessment of intake, genetics, body weight, the cardiovascular system, pregnancy, breast cancer, bone and the central nervous system. Those familiar with the first edition will note the areas of coronary heart disease, hypertension and stroke have been combined into the cardiovascular section. Effects on bone metabolism and the central nervous system are two new areas covered. Liver disease and cancers of the digestive tract were reviewed for the second edition; however, no changes were made and those chapters were reprinted from the first edition as appendices.

While generally easy to read, there is a considerable amount of assumed knowledge required, e.g. research models, metabolic pathways and neurochemistry. Several chapters provide glossaries which would be useful to readers without a medical/drug and alcohol background. However, the book is most suited to clinicians and others health professionals in the drug and alcohol field.

The chapters are formatted similarly with introductions, followed by epidemiology and systematic evaluation of research. Specific issues relevant to the topic lead in to discussion and conclusions, which in most chapters comment on “moderate” versus excessive

alcohol consumption. Suggestions for future research complete most chapters.

Specific features of the various chapters include the difficulty of defining “moderate” alcohol use and the variations between countries, which is discussed in Chapter 1. The limitations of self-report measures dominate “Assessment of Alcohol Consumption” in Chapter 2. The complexities of alcohol and genetics form Chapter 3, including the major findings from the Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism (COGA). This area is rapidly expanding and the 3 years since publication has seen the completion of the Human Genome Project and its implications for medical genetics in general.

Positive effects of alcohol on the risk of coronary heart disease forms part of the cardiovascular section, which is very comprehensive, as is discussion regarding breast cancer and the chapters on bone metabolism and the central nervous system. The latter covers the many receptor systems and pathways that alcohol effects, creating a complex and disjointed but important chapter.

Finally, I think alcohol and pregnancy is the “stand-out” chapter, providing a succinct, easy-to-read and interesting discussion. The evidence for abstinence in pregnancy (or uncertainty about safe levels) is constructed throughout the chapter and the difficulties in studying this area elucidated. Fetal and child development is followed with a focus on fetal alcohol syndrome and developmental problems.

One is left with much information about alcohol and its health effects, and the book presents this systematically and reasonably well. The reader is also left with a sense of the many aspects of alcohol and health we do not understand, and the numerous areas for future research to explore.

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**Drug War Heresies: learning from other vices, times and places**

ROBERT J. MACCOUN &amp; PETER REUTER

Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001

479 pp., Price: US\$25.00

ISBN 052179997X

In the final paragraph of their attempt to assess the empirical and philosophical arguments for competing drug policy positions, MacCoun & Reuter emerge from the closet to reveal: "our own sympathies are with the reform effort". This allegiance is well hidden in the previous 400-odd pages, where evidence of grudging support for drug war orthodoxies is abundant while sympathy for heretical tendencies is subtle. The repositioning towards reform of these very influential authors is another indication that the intellectual debate on this subject has recently been won convincingly by reformers.

MacCoun & Reuter note that growing support for reform in academic and intellectual circles has so far had little impact at the political level in the United States. However, political corrections, even in the United States, are now undeniably starting. In California, 61% voted in 2000 for Proposition 36, thereby mandating that \$US120 million was transferred from drug law enforcement to drug treatment. Majorities have now favoured reform in 17 of the 19 state-based drug policy ballot initiatives in the United States since 1996. Surely these are powerful indications that the winds of change are now finally starting to blow? In 2001, the reform-minded Netherlands was elected to the UN International Narcotics Control Board while the United States failed to gain sufficient votes to retain membership. A steady stream of European countries (including Portugal, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany) has begun introducing significant drug policy reforms in recent years. It is hard to see how the mounting evidence of growing US and international support for reform can be denied.

None should be surprised that political corrections in the sensitive area of drug policy lag far behind the remarkable recent shift in thinking of researchers, clinicians and policy analysts. Political corrections in difficult social policy issues often lag far behind changes in the thinking of opinion leaders. In the late 1960s, the proposition that the US war in Vietnam was unwinnable and immoral changed from heresy to orthodoxy within a few years, beginning first in academic circles before spreading to the wider community and their elected masters. In 1974, the American Psychiatric Association redefined homosexuality as a life-style rather than a disease, yet the necessary political and legislative adjustments still took many decades to occur. Not uncommonly, after such a change has occurred,

what seemed impossible in prospect is soon recognized to have been inevitable in retrospect.

The authors command a vast array of material, yet their fine-grained analysis tends to focus on myriads of detail while losing sight of some dominating themes. Trends in important outcomes such as drug overdose mortality and HIV infection are dealt with perfunctorily while the proposition that "harm reduction sends the wrong message" is dignified by pages of analysis despite any supportive evidence. Where is the corresponding analysis of the possibility that "zero tolerance sends a powerful message to drug traffickers that their lucrative profits are safe for the indefinite future"? It is not so much the answers the authors provide as the questions they pose that defines this book as a product of "inside the Beltway" *weltanschauung*. Like the Drug Czar's advisers in the recent film *Traffic*, the authors are reluctant to consider any drug policy approaches which go "outside the square".

Although MacCoun & Reuter document and acknowledge the failure of current policy, the magnitude of this failure and its immense human and financial cost are never conveyed adequately. Their division of the drug policy universe into "prohibitionists", "depenalisers" and "legalisers" is depressingly simplistic. Although acknowledging that there is negligible support among drug policy reform advocates for retail sale of drugs such as heroin, cocaine and amphetamine, the authors curiously still retain the emotive term "legalisers". Like some other authors on this subject, MacCoun & Reuter gratuitously dismiss commentators with differing views as "problem inflators" or "problem deflators".

Importantly, MacCoun & Reuter examine the US history of public policy responses to alcohol and tobacco in the 20th century and some behaviours popular with minorities but despised by the majority for additional insights relevant to illicit drugs. In recent decades in the United States, tobacco consumption has fallen considerably, some tobacco-related diseases have declined, and the tenacious tobacco industry has suffered some major setbacks. Curiously however, the authors remain more impressed by the power of the tobacco industry Goliath than the gains made against all odds by the public health David.

Although clearly a major driver of the illicit drug industry, the authors have little to say about the mammoth profits made by drug traffickers. These profits compensate for the risks taken by drug traffickers and reflect a drug policy heavily reliant on law enforcement. MacCoun & Reuter prefer to focus their discussion on the microeconomics of the illicit drug industry even though estimates of the price elasticity of illicit drugs have had limited predictive power. MacCoun & Reuter suggest that drug policy may have less impact on outcomes than general health, social and

economic policy. Unfortunately, this valuable insight is not further developed.

This book will be of interest to followers of the raging drug policy debate who are already reasonably familiar with the topic. It will probably appeal more to US readers than an international audience. The dense and somewhat repetitive style is not easy to read, although the authors venture into some conceptually complex areas. This book is recommended to those who seek a recent authoritative centrist analysis of drug policy.

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**Drugs and Society**, 6th edn

GLEN HANSON & PETER VENTURELLI

Sudbury, MA, USA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers,

2001

530 pp., Price: US\$ 58.75

ISBN 0 7637 1391 0

The book is an excellent introductory text for students who wish to study in the field of alcohol and other drugs. It is also a practical companion for clinicians interested in furthering their understanding of substance use and related harm. For teachers of alcohol and other drugs this book is a welcome resource, offering a comprehensive coverage of contemporary issues relating to substance use.

The authors aim to provide the reader with an understanding of the impact of substance use as it relates to ordinary people, by conveying a realistic perspective of drug-related problems on society. This task has been achieved with great style. The book has been organized skillfully to convey complex information in a simple way. Learning objectives guide the reader through each chapter, with key terms suitably defined. Chapters present a range of perspectives on key topics that are illustrated clearly and contrasted effectively. Points of view are suitably detailed and explained in terms that are easy to understand. Case studies are used to highlight a central issue and to illustrate further the impact of substance use. Key articles within each chapter describe a realistic perspective of drug use. The authors' clinical notes typify the impact of drugs on ordinary lives.

Chapter summaries are concise and well structured. Each chapter closes with a range of practical resources that are useful for both students and teachers. Key terms provide an effective technique for assessment. Review questions prompt the reader to test their knowledge and are a welcome resource for teachers. Exercises from the

web encourage students to familiarize themselves with using the internet as an educational resource. The internet sites nominated by the authors offer additional resource material complementary to each chapter and encourage the reader to further their knowledge. References are relevant and up to date.

The text expands with each chapter dedicated to a key theme. Chapter 1 explains the nature of drug use in terms of dependence and abuse. The authors' description of the cost of drug use to society is comprehensive yet concise. Descriptions of "street terms" highlight the importance of understanding drug subcultures. Data on prevalence and trends, costs to society and drugs in the work-place are detailed systematically to highlight how drugs impact on society. Many key facts and figures are limited, however, to issues relating specifically to the United States.

Chapter 2 presents a holistic perspective of drug use. The reader is guided through an excellent introduction to key perspectives by contrasting theories of biology, genetics, psychology, personality, learning behaviour and sociology. Drug related risk-taking is explored in terms of danger signals directing students to a checklist of problematic behaviour.

Chapter 3 focuses on drugs and the law, detailing an historical perspective on key issues relating to legislative change and drug movements. This is highly informative but, again, is written for an American audience. Additional internet sites for students outside the United States would be useful.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of models of addiction and subsequent risk factors. Key theories describe the origins and nature of addiction and risk factors across the lifespan. However, there is no reference to the Transtheoretical Model of Change, which many clinicians have adopted, particularly since the advent of harm minimization. Treatment perspectives were comprehensive but did not mention the advent of alternative treatments based on a harm minimization perspective, such as needle exchange programmes, injecting rooms and heroin trials. Assessment protocols and procedures were not discussed or explained as factors that pre-empt formal decisions for treatment. Appendices or web sites could have directed the reader to information on assessment, case management and referral procedures.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a comprehensive and excellent coverage on drug effects, homeostasis and drug actions. These chapters truly excel both in coverage of the topic and elegance in portraying highly complex information in a comprehensible style. The remaining chapters provide well-detailed information covering key aspects of both licit and illicit substances. In particular, the information on the history of drugs is well researched and highly informative. This onerous task has been well achieved.

Of note is Appendix D, with key information on drug effects, drug withdrawal and drug overdose signs and symptoms. Future additions may consider expanding this to include emergency care procedures. Complementary information might also include “safety tips” for preventing overdose, such as do not inject alone. This book is highly recommended for students, researchers and clinicians interested in the field of alcohol and other drugs.

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**Drugs and Your Teenager: a practical guide for Australian parents**

MARTIN PALIN & SHELLEY BEATTY

East Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia: IP

Communications, 2000

128 pp., Price: AU\$21.95

ISBN 0 646 39573 4

The fear that our children might become addicted to drugs is one of the overriding concerns of our time. Yet perhaps this fear is overstated? As the title implies, this book sets out to provide parents with a survival kit for responding to teenage drug and alcohol use. Martin Palin & Shelley Beatty review information and misinformation about teenage drug use, invite readers to reflect on their own behaviour and beliefs and provide a raft of practical suggestions for effective engagement with one's teenager. All this is provided in a concise and easy-to-read book. It is written for Australian parents, but appears to be equally relevant for English-speaking parents in other western countries.

The book offers sound advice for parents, but it risks alienating readers in the opening chapters, mainly through espousing the sentiment that “kids are cool” and “parents are inept and hypocritical”. Chapter 1 provides a brief historical and cultural account of substance use, including the influence of religion and fashion. This account leads the reader to question the rationale for prohibition. In Chapter 2, the authors present teenage drug use within a developmental framework, with a view to countering the clinical connotations (of drug use) that parents acquire from the media and elsewhere. The authors avoid the issue of trauma and subsequent drug use among young people. In so doing, the book does not match the reality of life for parents of teenagers with a history of maltreatment or emotional deprivation (a sizeable minority of our

young people), and it risks predicting a falsely optimistic outlook for those children. Similarly, it misses the mark for parents raising teenagers in our most disadvantaged communities. In Chapter 2 the concept of drug dependency is introduced in the context of such everyday dependencies as the need for clothing, cars and pets for companionship “. . . if people were denied access to their dependencies they would not feel right”. This discussion was squarely aimed at challenging parents' attitudes towards drug use, but I thought it blurred the distinction between needs that were adaptive and those that were maladaptive.

Chapter 3 is devoted to describing the ten most frequent parental responses to adolescent drug use. Surprisingly, they were all bad! There were no positive aspects that might redeem an otherwise inept performance by Australia's parents. The list suggests that parental responses have not altered greatly since teenage drug use first became an issue in the 1960s, and that today's parents learnt little from their own experiences of the drug culture in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The book refers to parental double standards with regard to alcohol and cigarette use and gambling, without reference to parents' experimenting with drugs in their youth. The book also implies that readers are not currently using illegal drugs.

“Before you do anything rash” is the aptly named title of Chapter 4. This section provides clear and sensible advice on what parents should do if they suspect drug use, before they raise the issue with their child. By doing this preparatory work parents are less likely to arrive at wrong conclusions, and hence avoid harming their relationship or credibility. What I liked most about this strategy was that it also offers an opportunity for a time buffer between the initial shock of suspecting drug use and raising the concern with your child.

Chapter 5 admirably covers the trickiest part of the whole process: raising the issue with your teenager. The authors offer very balanced advice on how to conduct this. They describe a style of engagement with your teenager that allows the parent to hear the young person's views, and to empathize with them, without endorsing the behaviour. Chapter 6 teaches parents counselling techniques that the authors have adapted from professional counselling. This strategy extends the parent's role into new and possibly uncharted territory. The final chapter offers advice on harm minimization strategies for young people that persist with drug use. This, too, offers well-constructed and highly practical advice. There is also a useful appendix that describes the most common drugs in our society, including their effects and health risks. It would be useful to see this appendix revised in any future editions to include the broader array of associated risks, including occupational impairment, mental health problems and effects on social relationships.

*Drugs and Your Teenager* challenged some of my beliefs and concerns about teenager drug and alcohol use, at times eliciting a reaction of “this can’t be right”! The authors present their views as fact, without reference to supporting literature, and there is no attempt to present opposing views on some of the more contentious issues. While this makes for a clear and uncomplicated read for parents who simply want to be told what they should do, the enquiring reader might perceive they are being subtly shifted towards an ideological position on teen-

age drug use that is overly permissive. That said, the book redeems itself by providing a wealth of practical advice for parents.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

The Board of Directors of the Jellinek Memorial Fund is pleased to announce that the Jellinek Memorial Award for 2002 has been awarded to **Dr Mark B. Sobell** (*Center for Psychological Studies, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, Florida*) for his **major contributions to research on assessment, prevention, early intervention, and behavioural (clinical and experimental) studies**. The award will be presented to Dr Sobell by Dr William R. Miller at the meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Behavioural Therapy in Reno, Nevada, in November 2002.

The Selection Committee for the 2003 Jellinek Memorial Fund award will be chaired by Dr Harold D. Holder. The specific category for the award is **Epidemiology and Population Studies**. Nominations for this award can be forwarded to: *Dr Harold D. Holder, Prevention Research Center, Berkeley, California 94704, USA* by **1 November, 2002**.