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CONTACT - DIVISION OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
ROSS S561 - 667-2573

Harbinger's column

Harbinger is York University's peer counselling and referral service. Drop in at 214 Vanier residence or phone 667-3059-3632. Open 10-6, Monday to Friday.

Booze abuse blues isn't news but anti-drink campaigns fail

By LINDSAY COBB and SUE KAISER

Alcohol misuse is considered by many to be the greatest social problem existing in North America today. Alcohol is now cheaper, relatively, than it has ever been. The number and variety of outlets have mounted steadily. The age at which use begins has declined.

In the last 20 years, alcohol use in Ontario has risen by 24 per cent. Now, an amazing 90 per cent of Ontario residents are drinkers. The percentage rises to 92.5 per cent when you consider people between 20 and 24 years of age. And yet, most of us who are in the process of learning habits and developing lifestyles which include liquor, know too little about reasonable use of alcohol.

Traditionally, educational ventures aimed at dissuading alcohol use have arisen from two main sources: the temperance, or moral view, and the health and medical perspective. Both of these approaches have been shown to lack impact and practicality for many people. In opting for abstinence, the temperance approach to alcohol requires a person to remove him or herself from the great majority of peers and society. Social custom makes it difficult to be among the 8 to 10 per cent who do not drink. The reasons for abstinence, to be acceptable for such a drastic personal statement, must be compelling. It's obvious that for most of us, arguments for full sobriety are less than forceful.

The medical or health perspective is the primary approach of high school educators. In metro high schools, health education



curriculum plans for only 2-3 hours of class time to be devoted to drug and alcohol use. (Fieldstone study, 1975) The fact that the physically debilitating effects of alcohol do not appear in young people leads to complacency.

Knowing that drinking 9 ounces of liquor a day on a consistent basis will drastically increase your chances of liver cirrhosis, doesn't really phase those of us who can think of ourselves as moderate drinkers in comparison. We do know, however, that problems increase with per capita consumption. We also know that very small amounts of blood alcohol in young people can lead to impaired driving. The accident risk level for

young people is far below the .08 per cent (Blood Alcohol Content) which is the legal limit. It is more like .03 per cent and can be reached after only one or two drinks on an empty stomach.

The Addiction Research Foundation has outlined some "safe" drinking habits, in an attempt to minimize the long term effects of alcohol use. These include: drinking slowly; restricting drinks to one each hour; limiting the total consumption on each occasion to two or three drinks; limiting the frequency of drinking to once or twice a week.

For more information, contact the Addiction Research Foundation at 33 Russell Street, or drop in at Harbinger.

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