

**ALCOHOLISM
COUNCIL
OF THE
CINCINNATI
AREA
NCADD**

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The candle is a symbol of our pledge to pass the light of *Recovery with Dignity* to all who suffer from the effects of alcoholism and other drug abuse.

a United Way agency

April 3, 2003

Mr. David Wells, Editorial Page Editor
The Cincinnati Enquirer
312 Elm Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

Dear Mr. Wells:

A recent report in the New England Journal of Medicine has stirred up a long-standing controversy over alcohol's health benefits and spawned a considerable amount of media attention. The report, entitled "Roles of Drinking Pattern and Type of Alcohol Consumed in Coronary Heart Disease in Men," draws the conclusion that consumption of alcohol decreases the risk of myocardial infarction among men. While such research may be interesting, how the public will interpret it is frightening.

The Alcoholism Council of the Cincinnati Area has long followed the research that focuses on the effects of alcohol, both positive and negative. We recognize that while there may be some benefits in moderate drinking, defined as no more than two drinks a day for men and no more than 1 for women (a drink defined as 12 oz. regular beer, 5 oz. of wine and 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits) certain medical detriments of alcohol need to remain in the forefront of any discussion about alcohol and health.

We caution that certain categories of people should not drink at all: children and adolescents, pregnant women, recovering alcoholics, those with medical disorders known to be worsened by alcohol, and those taking certain medicines or suffering certain psychiatric illnesses. Further, we believe it is hazardous to "recommend" or "prescribe" drinking as a preventive measure, since for many alcohol is a dangerous drug of addiction.

The downside of alcohol consumption is well chronicled. Eighteen million Americans suffer from alcohol problems, almost half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol-related, and alcohol contributes to illness in each of the three top causes of death—heart disease, cancer and stroke. The health benefits of alcohol are less certain. Dr. Ira Goldberg reminds us "if alcohol were a newly discovered drug, we can be sure no pharmaceutical company would develop it to prevent cardiovascular disease."

The report contains a number of caveats, including this closing statement, "We encourage adults to discuss alcohol use with their physicians and *together* make individualized decisions about appropriate consumption." The Alcoholism Council believes this to be good advice and offers this final caution:

It is dangerous to promote the notion that alcohol consumption is a healthy practice. One should keep in mind the tremendous number of medical complications that alcohol, even in meager amounts, can cause.

If any Cincinnati resident is curious or confused about the pros and cons of alcohol, I encourage them to take part in National Alcohol Screening Day April 10. Interested individuals can visit one of four area screening sites to obtain the information they need to know how to drink responsibly and how to avoid the risks of alcohol addiction. In addition, they can partake in a brief survey, conducted by trained volunteers, to determine if they are at risk for alcohol addiction. Locations and times for screenings can be obtained by calling the Alcoholism Council at 281-7880.

Sincerely,

Nan Franks Richardson
Chief Executive Officer