

Short bio and information for a national series of public meetings “Ten things the alcohol industry won’t tell you about alcohol”

Doug Sellman, MBChB, PhD, FRANZCP, FACHAM, is a psychiatrist and addiction medicine specialist who has been working in the addiction treatment field in New Zealand for the last 25 years. He has been Director of the National Addiction Centre (NAC), University of Otago, Christchurch, since a successful tender process in 1996. The NAC has developed into the lead research and training unit within the national addiction treatment field, dedicated to improving treatment for people with addiction-related problems in Aotearoa New Zealand. He was promoted within the university to a Personal Chair in Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine in 2005. His academic highlights include: a national postgraduate training programme for a multidisciplinary student group in addiction and co-existing disorders; a two-week Addiction Medicine block course for 5th year medical students; ten PhD students investigating a wide range of addiction-related topics; and internationally recognized research on the effectiveness of motivational interviewing and the optimum treatment for people with “alcoholic depression”. He began his career working with adults who have addiction and mental health problems, but for the last 15 years has worked as a consultant psychiatrist in the addiction treatment stream of the Youth Specialty Service, a mental health service for 13-18 year olds, Canterbury District Health Board.

Professor Sellman is embarking on a national alcohol series during sabbatical leave (September – November 2009) supported by the University of Otago and the Canterbury District Health Board. This series of public meetings is launching a new national group called Alcohol Action NZ www.alcoholaction.co.nz in parallel with the Law Commission’s review of the liquor laws.

The main points he will outline are that: we are in the midst of a national alcohol crisis, driven in part by excessive commercialisation of alcohol, and obfuscation of information about alcohol by the alcohol industry; and to gain better control of alcohol, the public need to be better informed about alcohol, but more importantly, there needs to be more effective regulation of the supply, marketing and sale of alcohol in New Zealand. An internationally-derived, scientifically-based [1, 2] set of policy directives called the 5+ Solution are being promoted as a guide to future alcohol policy.

The 5+ Solution is as follows:

1. Raise alcohol prices
 2. Raise the purchase age
 3. Reduce alcohol accessibility
 4. Reduce marketing and advertising
 5. Increase drink-driving counter-measures
- PLUS: Increase treatment opportunities for heavy drinkers.

Ten things the alcohol industry won’t tell you about alcohol are as follows:

1. Alcohol is a highly intoxicating drug which is fairly easy to overdose on
2. Alcohol can cause brain damage
3. Alcohol causes aggression
4. Alcohol is fattening in moderate drinkers
5. Alcohol can cause cancer
6. Alcohol cardio-protection has been talked up
7. The alcohol industry actively markets alcohol to young people
8. Low risk drinking means drinking low amounts of alcohol
9. A lot of the alcohol industry’s profit comes from heavy drinking
10. There is a solution to the national alcohol crisis: The 5+ Solution.

References:

1. Babor T, Caetano R, Casswell S, Edwards G, Giesbrecht N, Graham K, Grube J, Gruenewald P, Hill L, Holder H, Homel R, Osterberg E, Rehm J, Room R, Rossow I. *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity. Research and Public Policy*. Oxford Medical Publications, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.
2. Anderson P, Chisholm D, Fuhr D. Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of policies and programmes to reduce the harm caused by alcohol. *Lancet* 2009;373:2234-2246

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