

APRIL IS ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH 2011

By G Raymond McCullough

One year has come and gone and it is once again April and Alcohol Awareness Month. As a refresher, if you didn't read last year's article, let me explain a little about the origin and intent of Alcohol Awareness Month. Alcohol Awareness Month has been sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) since 1987 and it encourages local communities to focus on alcoholism and alcohol-related issues.

Thus as in the previous year the intent of this article is to raise your awareness about the potential and harmful impact of alcohol abuse. Take note I did refer to the harmful impact of alcohol use since there are many individuals that drink without any ill effects. So again the focus is on alcohol abuse. For the purpose of this article we will simply define alcohol abuse as individuals that use alcohol in a way that has had or has the potential to have a negative impact. The negative impact is usually reflected in a person experiencing intrapersonal, interpersonal, physical, legal, and occupational problems. You likely know someone you care about who frequently crosses the line between the appropriate use of alcohol and abuse (when it has harmful implications for us, our loved ones, and our community). Typically, it doesn't take a consultation with a counselor to tell us when alcohol use has become a problem. In my 25 years as a drug and alcohol counselor, conducting thousands of drug and alcohol assessments, I've always had the sense (in the vast majority of the cases) when I shared my clinical impression with the client that I

was merely confirming what the client already suspected.

Before we go any further, let me share with you what The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services would like you to know:

People who abuse alcohol can be:

- College students who binge drink at local bars.
- Pregnant women who drink and put their babies at risk for fetal alcohol syndrome.
- Professionals who drink after a long day of work.
- Senior citizens who drink out of loneliness.

In 2007, more than one fifth (23.3 %) of persons aged 12 or older participated in binge drinking at least once in the 30 days prior to taking SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). This translates to about 57.8 million people. The rate in 2007 is similar to the rate in 2006 (23.0 %).

Warning Signs of Alcohol Abuse

If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, you may have a problem with alcohol:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Does your drinking worry your family?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after drinking?

Source: [How to Cut Down on Your Drinking](#)

The rates of alcoholism and substance abuse are not the same across ethnic groups in the US. African-Americans and Native Americans have the highest incidence substance abuse problems, with the latter group having the highest. This fact prompts me to ponder what do these 2 ethnic groups have in common that may contribute to higher rates of alcohol and other drug abuse. I have a hypothesis and will write about that in next month's article.

More sobering statistics about alcohol abuse:

- About 10 to 20% of the people who drink heavily eventually develop cirrhosis of the liver (i.e., a scarring of the liver).
Note: Heavy drinking is defined as 4 drinks for women and 5 drinks for men per episode of drinking.
- In the United States, more than 2 million people per year drive "under the influence."
- One study of Midwestern States found that 46 percent of ninth graders who reported drinking alcohol in the previous month said they obtained the alcohol from a person aged 21 or older.
- In the United States, the correlation between the battering of women and alcohol abuse is the highest for men who believe that male control and power over women are acceptable in various situations.
- Forty percent of ninth-grade students reported having consumed alcohol before they were age 13. In contrast, only 26.2 percent of ninth graders reported having smoked cigarettes, and 11.6 percent reported having used marijuana before they were age 13.
- 25% of all emergency room admissions, 33% of all suicides and more than 50% of all homicides and incidents of domestic violence are alcohol-related.

- In one study, almost one-fourth of ninth graders reported binge drinking (having had five or more drinks on one occasion) in the past month.
- Up to 40 percent of industrial fatalities and 47 percent of industrial injuries can be linked to alcohol consumption and alcoholism.
- Among drivers aged 15-20, fatal crashes involving a single vehicle at night are three times more likely than other fatal crashes to be alcohol-related.
- In 1995, there were 51,737 federal prisoners and 224,900 state prisoners who were incarcerated because of alcohol or drug abuse.
- One hundred thousand Americans die of alcohol problems each year.
- Sixty-seven percent of eighth graders and 83 percent of tenth graders believe that alcohol is readily available to them for consumption.
- According to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, there are 105,000 annual alcohol-related deaths due to drunk drivers and related injuries or diseases.
- More than 40% of individuals who start drinking before the age of 13 will develop alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.
- According to a 1995 Weekly Reader survey, more than half (54%) of fourth through sixth graders reported learning about the dangers of illicit drugs at school, but fewer than a third (30%) learned about the dangers of drinking and smoking at school.
- More than 18% of Americans experience alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence at some time in their lives.
- In general, unmarried workers (divorced, separated or never married) have about twice the rate of alcoholism or alcohol abuse as married workers.

- As many as 3 million Americans over the age of 60 are alcoholics or have serious drinking problems.
- Alcoholism statistics in the United States remain staggering. There are approximately 14 million people in the country addicted to alcohol and millions more who display symptoms of abuse, including binge drinking. Sadly, a reported 2.6 million binge drinkers in 2002 were between the ages of 12 and 17.
- Nearly one-fourth of all persons admitted to general hospitals have alcohol problems or are undiagnosed alcoholics being treated for the consequences of their drinking.
- Underage drinking costs the United States more than \$58 billion every year — enough to buy every public school student a state-of-the-art computer.
- Beer is the drink most commonly consumed by people stopped for alcohol-impaired driving or involved in alcohol-related crashes.
- Individuals with drinking problems or alcoholism at any time in their lives suffer income reductions ranging from 1.5 percent to 18.7 percent depending on age and sex compared with those with no such diagnosis.
- Individuals with alcoholism and drug abusers are at increased risk for HIV/AIDS, as well as other infectious diseases like hepatitis and tuberculosis.
- More than 40% of separated or divorced women were married to or lived with a problem drinker.
- Over 40 percent of corporate CEOs who responded to one survey estimated that the use of alcohol and other drugs costs them from 1-10 percent of their payroll.
- According to a 1995 national survey of fourth through sixth graders who read the Weekly Reader, 30 percent of students reported that they received "a lot" of pressure from their classmates to drink beer.
- Alcohol abuse costs businesses twice as much as illegal drug use.
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that the 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws have saved 21,887 lives since the mid-1970s.
- Alcohol impaired drivers get behind the wheel 123 million times a year in the United States.

Any questions?

Now that you have some statistical information, let me continue by sharing some of my personal insights and perspectives. I believe any effort to heighten your awareness and that of the community you live in—with the goal of reducing the negative impact of alcohol use—you must ask yourself some hard questions. As I did last year I want you, the reader, to respond to the following:

1. Why is it that major segments of American society have this insatiable appetite for alcohol and other substances of abuse?
2. The previous question infers that the spirit of our communities may be broken. If this is true what should we be doing to heal our spirit?
3. Have we become a society of victims who are inclined to shirk personal responsibility, for ourselves, our children, our families?
4. As individuals and as a community are we modeling the behavior—to include public policy-- that will build healthy families and communities?
5. Have we become so distracted that we have lost our sensitivity and empathy as an important part of dealing with our family and community needs?
6. Are we asking alcohol and drug treatment providers to deliver on something they are incapable or are not equipped to deliver on...are our expectations realistic? Is prevention the key?

Last year I had hoped that the readers of this article would share their responses with me. That did not occur. So this year I'm again asking you to email me at graymond@thejuanitacenter.com with your responses to the six preceding questions. Together we can make a difference for our children and grandchildren by asking and answering the tough questions and then taking action on what is revealed.

Finally, I want to re-iterate if we are to be successful in reducing the negative impact of alcohol use in our communities we must act on our new and evolving awareness—change does not occur through insight and awareness alone. It requires action.