LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

ONE HUNDRED ALCOHOLIC DOCTORS: A 21-YEAR FOLLOW-UP

HELMUT SEITZ

Department of Medicine and Laboratory of Alcohol Research, Liver Disease and Nutrition, Salem Medical Centre, 69121 Heidelberg, Germany

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I read with great interest the article by Lloyd (2002) entitled ‘One hundred alcoholic doctors: a 21-year follow-up’ in the July/August 2002 issue of Alcohol and Alcoholism.

I was wondering, however, why, in Table 7, colonic cancer was listed among deaths due to non-alcohol causes. Although colonic cancer is less frequently associated with chronic alcohol misuse, as compared with rectal cancer, more and more data appear underlining the association between colorectal cancer and alcohol.

A recent consensus panel by the WHO stated: ‘Epidemiological data indicate that the consumption of alcoholic beverages, even at low intake, results in an increased risk of colorectal adenomas and cancer. The association seems more consistent for beer and rectal cancer’ (WHO Consensus statement on the role of nutrition in colorectal cancer, 1999).

REFERENCES


REPLY

GARETH LLOYD

2 Saxfield Drive, Baguley Hall, Manchester M23 1PY, UK

Professor Seitz is perfectly correct to draw attention to a possible link between colorectal cancer and alcohol consumption. There is indeed some evidence of a connection and publication of his letter will clarify this.

My problem with this connection was in finding evidence that it was either confined to consumers with a dependent alcoholism or predominantly so. I was also unable to find evidence to support a genetic link between alcoholism and colorectal cancer similar to the link between oesophageal cancer and alcoholism, though I accept that a different attribution is possible. To further muddy the water, I can say that the alcoholic doctor with colonic cancer was an avid spirit drinker and eschewed beer.