EDITORIAL

Special Issue on Alcohol and Brain Damage

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When the brain is damaged by alcohol, whether in early development or in later life, the distress caused is often prolonged because the damage may be permanent or very slow to recover, but the condition is not fatal as with some other complications of excessive consumption of alcohol. The finding in an Irish acute general hospital, that 25% of ‘delayed discharge’ was accounted for by patients with alcohol-related brain disorders (Popoola et al., 2008), is typical for many acute hospitals in the UK too.

If society wishes to provide care for this condition, the costs are extensive because care may be for many years, often for the rest of that individual’s life. Full residential care is sometimes required.

For countries such as the UK where alcohol consumption is increasing and the number of casualties rising, the toll of brain damage represents a significant cost for the next generation.

Understanding more about these conditions, their treatment and their prevention is one subject of this issue. The other is to review growing evidence that ethanol, when taken in large amounts, may affect the developing brain to cause changes which may contribute to later behaviour problems and dependence on alcohol, a worrying possibility in a decade when young people in our society are drinking more heavily than previously. We are grateful to our guest editors, E. Jane Marshall, Allan D. Thomson, Irene Guerrini, and Clive Harper and the authors for bringing this project to fruition.

REFERENCE