

Positive Effects of Moderate Alcohol Use on Human Health: the Futile Search for a Third Side of the Coin



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SUMMARY: *The debate on the possible health benefits of alcohol use has been gaining in intensity. Apart from lay and usually ill-founded assertions, it is not uncommon to come across arguments referring to professional sources which are also spread and advocated by some physicians. The author of this article points out the highly dangerous phenomenon of the conflict of interest and other ethical dimensions of such approaches, as well as drawing attention to other professional aspects and correlates this issue involves. Recent evidence clearly shows that it is inappropriate, in both professional and ethical terms, to recommend “preventive alcohol use”. Alcohol causes more deaths than it can prevent. To recommend moderate drinking on the basis of its preventive effect for some diagnoses (e.g. the much-debated cardioprotective effect) means at the same time to ignore the fact that it significantly increases the risks of other diagnoses (such as liver cirrhosis, stroke, and cancer). Including references to comprehensive reviews, the illustrative data used in the text only pertains to selected areas of health consequences. While the current campaigns, especially that involving mass media messages advocating the protective health effects of “moderate” long-term drinking, may seem to imply a major shift or even breakthrough in the view of the influence of alcohol on health, they only represent a futile search for a third side of the coin. In fact, these campaigns are there to serve the alcohol industry or to give consumers an argument to justify their behaviour. Populism and the tabloidization this topic entails are a major issue which can produce long-term negative consequences in both clinical and public health terms. It should not be underestimated and efforts should be made to prevent the principles of critical thinking and the interpretation of the available clinical and research evidence from being compromised.*

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