

Guiding questions for the discussion on "Prevention and early intervention for alcohol-related harm"

BELGIUM

Rapporteur:

Salvatore Campanella, psychologue and researcher at the Departement of Psychiatry, CHU Brugmann, Bussels

Hendrik Kajosch, psychotherapist and psychiatrist Chef de Clinique- Adjoint, CHU-Brugmann

Which national data on the use of alcohol exist (consumption, costs, health damage)?

Belgium ranks third among Europeans when it comes to alcohol consumption. Belgians drink an average of 12.6 liter of pure alcohol per year (WHO 2018).

A study amongst students at the Erasmus University on the consumption of alcohol showed a high rate of excessive drinkers.

- 40% of students are drunk at least once a week.
- -Average weekly consumption were 17 doses.

There are ongoing scientific studies, for instance, on the success of preventive measures concerning alcohol consumption as well as the abuse of alcohol.

At the clinical level there is no awareness of the cognitive problems. There are a lot of trials on medication, but no studies how to treat specific and proven.

Which legal provisions and initiatives to avoid the abuse of alcohol do exist in your country?

In Belgium, health is a federal task, but there is no decisive action, besides some health information. More preventive measures are needed.

Some health information is in place: a little sign on spirits and wine indicates that alcohol consumption is not indicated for pregnant woman. Producers are allowed to give additional "information" on the bottle: "Good for nature, good for us". More scientific based and independent information is needed.

Are there special protective regulations for children and youths?

Ideas to make restrictions selling alcohol to young people failed and were not taken up by politics.

Campaign BOB from the ministry of traffic to drive safely and do not consume alcohol at all when driving. The ministry stated that alcohol induced accidents have reduced.

How is the care of alcoholics organised, what do you see as positive and what is problematic?

General practitioners and internist can purchase a special certificate for addiction therapy (on a voluntary basis).

A practitioner without the certification can refer a patient where he suspects problems with too high alcohol consumption to a one day consultation and screening.

It is up to the dependent to seek help. People who are strongly motivated will find some help, but there is a gap in concept and care for those less active.

Practitioners have to realize alcohol problems of their patients. More information is needed on the possibility of the day screening.

Some psycho-education is not a really effective treatment and too short and less intense to find a substitute behavior. For two of three patients this does not change the relapse rate.

Of which significance are psychotherapeutic interventions within the framework of prevention and early intervention and which role do psychotherapists have in the treatment of alcoholics, both as inpatients and outpatients?

In CHU clinic a 10 days detoxify period is followed by a phase of reducing medication progressively and starting psychotherapy. Patients stay in the clinic for 3-4 weeks. There are different stages, in the last one a patient is treated open house and has to sign a contract, that he has to leave if he starts drinking again.

There is a treatment gap when patients leave the hospital.

What would in your opinion be a good environment for a moderate consumption of alcohol?!

In Belgium advertising of the big beer brewer is ubiquitous at sporting events. The dangers of consuming spirits are addressed, but the consumption of beer and wine is socially accepted. That's a problematic message, any alcohol unit counts. Long-term consumption of wine and beer has the same negative effect on the body and the brain. More health information is needed.

How should existing services for the treatment of alcoholics be developed further?

More outreach help is needed. Today it needs a high personal motivation, to get professional help.

What needs to change in your country in order to warrant this development?

- Changes in cultural patterns are essential. Drinking has a positive public image and is socially accepted in Belgium, consuming strong beer is advertised as a sign of masculinity "If you can't beer it, you are not strong enough". "What is better than a strong beer when looking a football match" "Men know why."
- More awareness of the dangers of alcohol consumption is needed
- In large parts of the society alcohol dependency is considered a weakness of character, not a disease. Dependents are stigmatized.
- Prevention and information is not enough to stop consumption.
- More scientific Research is needed: how to treat specific and proven? How does a person move from excessive consumption to a dependency? What are the mechanisms in your brain that control behavior?