Alcohol Essay, Research Paper

About a week ago, I was passively watching television until a governmentally-funded advertisement caught my eye. In this commercial, a young child goes to the family refrigerator and gets his father a bottle of beer. Then a stereotypical narrator says, “When some parents crave their favorite drug, they’ll even use their own kids to get it. Alcohol is the number one drug problem in this country. Not marijuana. Not cocaine. Don’t be fooled. Alcohol is a drug.” This commercial alarmed me because the majority of people I know consume alcohol. I decided to investigate alcohol and see how bad this all-dangerous “drug” really was. My findings were very shocking, and they led me to question a central federal policy. Should the federal government’s abstinence ideology concerning alcohol be reconsidered?

Contrary to what the federal government would have people believe, moderate consumption of alcohol is very healthy for the human body!

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAA] would have people believe that alcohol is currently the worst drug in the United States. This institution along with Center for Substance Abuse Prevention [CSAP] periodically releases conclusions concerning alcohol to the public that are both misleading and fraudulent. These comments are not based on scientific evidence but instead seem to reflect a neo-prohibitionist effort to stigmatize alcohol. Here are some of the examples of statements made by officials representing governmental agencies in the last five years that are neither based on conclusive, scientific evidence nor even remotely reported from a disinterested, neutral position: Alcohol is the dirtiest drug we have; It permeates and damages all tissue; No other drug can cause the same degree of harm that it does. Alcohol is harmful to the body; Alcohol is a poison, and drinking it might lead to death; Alcohol is toxic (no level of consumption indicated); The effects of alcohol on men (no level of consumption indicated) are that hormone levels change, causing lower sex drive and enlarged breasts; Alcohol is a gateway drug leading people into illicit drug use; Alcohol (no level of consumption indicated) can cause deterioration of the heart muscle.

The same federally funded institutions that release misleading statements to the public, also project their belief that there is no difference between moderate drinking and alcohol abuse–the two are portrayed as one and the same. After some of the statements made by the officials cited in the previous paragraph you might of noticed the notation (no level of consumption indicated). These notations illustrate how the federally-funded agencies fail to differentiate between moderate consumption of alcohol and abusive consumption of alcohol. The difference between moderate consumption and abusive consumption is the single-most important aspect of alcohol’s effects on health. First let me define both moderate consumption and abusive consumption. Moderate consumption is defined by American medical researchers as 2-3 drinks of alcohol for men and 1-1.5 drinks for women. Both of these guidelines pertain to what medical researchers call average-sized people. They define average bodyweight for a male being 190lbs and average bodyweight for a female being 130lbs. A drink of alcohol is defined as 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. Any consumption of alcohol beyond the 2-3 drinks for men and 1-1.5 drinks for women is considered abusive consumption. The benefits of regular, moderate consumption of alcohol as compared to abstinence and heavy consumption are really quite surprising. They include overall better health, increased longevity, a reduced chance of having heart attacks or strokes, a reduced chance of suffering from hypertension or high blood pressure, peripheral artery disease, Alzheimer’s disease, and the common cold. Moderate consumption of alcohol appears to be beneficial to reducing or preventing Angina Pectoris, bone fractures, Diabetes, digestive ailments, Duodenal Ulcer, Erectile Dysfunction, gallstones, Hepatitis A, kidney stones, liver disease, Macular Degeneration (blindness), Pancreatic Cancer, Parkinson’s Disease, poor cognition and memory, poor physical condition in elderly, Rheumatoid Arthritis, stress and depression, and Type B Gastritis. There are numerous scientific studies that support these claims as opposed to the fraudulent claims by the officials representing the federally funded agencies whose goals seem to be to prohibit alcohol altogether instead of educating the public.

Here is some of the information and conclusions from scientific studies I found on the World Wide Web concerning Alcohol and its effects when taken in moderation. Alcohol has been used medicinally throughout recorded history; its medicinal properties are mentioned 191 times in the Old and New Testaments. As early as the turn of the century there was evidence that moderate consumption of alcohol was associated with a decrease in the risk of heart attack. And the evidence of health benefits of moderate consumption has continued to grow over time. A review of research evidence from 1900 to 1986 found a strong, consistent relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and reduction in cardiovascular disease in general and coronary artery disease in particular. This is important because cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in the United States, and heart disease kills about one million Americans each and every year. The Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recently wrote that “Numerous well-designed studies have concluded that moderate drinking is associated with improved cardiovascular health,” and the Nutrition Committee of the American Heart Association recently reported that “The lowest mortality occurs in those who consume one or two drinks per day.” Several years ago a World Health Organization Technical Committee on Cardiovascular Disease asserted that the relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and reduced death from heart disease could no longer be doubted. But the benefits are not limited, important as they are, to reductions in heart disease. A recent Harvard study found the risk of death from all causes to be 21% to 28% lower among men who drank alcohol moderately, compared to abstainers. A large-scale study in China recently found that middle-aged men who drank moderately had a nearly 20% lower overall mortality compared to abstainers. Harvard’s Nurses’ Health Study of over 85,000 women found reduced mortality among moderate drinkers. A British analysis of 12,000 male physicians found that moderate drinkers had the lowest risk of death from all causes during the 13 year study. A large study of about 88,000 people conducted over a period of ten years found that moderate drinkers were about 27% less likely to die during the period than were either abstainers or heavy drinkers. The superior longevity was largely due to a reduction of such diseases as coronary heart disease, cancer, and respiratory diseases. A large study funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism found that moderate drinking increased the length of life by about 3% among white males. A twelve year long prospective study of over 200,000 men found that subjects who had consumed alcohol in moderation were less likely to die than those who abstained from alcohol. A nation-wide survey in the U.S. revealed that daily moderate drinkers experienced significantly less acute hospitalization. A nine year study of predictors of good health found moderate alcohol consumption to be associated with the most favorable health scores. A nation-wide Canadian study found moderate drinkers who consumed alcohol daily to have 15% less disability than the general population. A Dutch study found that moderate drinkers under stress were less likely to be absent from work than were either abstainers or heavy drinkers. Harvard researchers have identified the moderate consumption of alcohol as a proven way to reduce coronary heart disease risk. An exhaustive review of all major heart disease studies found that “Alcohol consumption is related to total mortality in a U-shaped manner, where moderate consumers have a reduced total mortality compared with total non-consumers and heavy consumers.” A National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism study asserts that “The totality of evidence on moderate alcohol and CHD (coronary heart disease) supports a judgment of a cause-effect relationship….there are cardio-protective benefits associated with responsible, moderate alcohol intake.” The Harvard Health Professionals Follow-Up Study of over 44,000 males found moderate alcohol consumption to be associated with a 37% reduction in coronary disease. A British study of women found moderate consumption of alcohol to be associated with lower levels of cardiovascular risk factors. The Honolulu Heart Study found a 49% reduction in coronary heart disease among men who drink alcohol in moderation. Harvard researchers concluded about coronary heart disease that “Consumption of one or two drinks of beer, wine, or liquor per day has corresponded to a reduction in risk of approximately 20-40%.” At a recent conference, researchers from Korea, Italy, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and the United States reported striking reductions in death among moderate drinkers, with heart disease and total mortality rates about one half or less compared to non-drinkers. After reviewing the research, Dr. David Whitten reported that “The studies that have been done show pretty clearly that the chances of suffering cardiac death are dramatically reduced by drinking” one or two drinks a day and asserted that “We don’t have any drugs that are as good as alcohol.” Based on the medical evidence, noted investigator Dr. Curtis Ellison asserted that “abstinence from alcohol is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease.” A recent study published in the American Heart Association’s journal found abstainers’ risk of stroke to be double that of moderate drinkers. The American Heart Association has also reported moderate consumption of alcohol to be associated with dramatically decreased risk of stroke among both men and women, regardless of age or ethnicity. A recent Harvard University study found the lowest levels of hypertension among young adults who consumed one to three drinks per day. Harvard researchers recently found moderate drinkers to be almost 1/3 less likely to suffer Peripheral Artery Disease (a significant cause of death among the elderly) than those consuming less than one drink per week. A recent French study found moderate drinkers to have a 75% lower risk for Alzheimer’s Disease and an 80% lower risk for senile dementia. Moderate drinkers have been found to be more resistant than abstainers to five strains of the common cold virus. And the list goes on.\*

Before I investigated alcohol’s effects on health, I thought that defending alcohol would be very difficult. I chose this topic because I had never been exposed to someone that could really support a statement that declared alcohol “healthy”. All the commercials I had seen on television portrayed alcohol as an “evil” thing that only deviants chose to indulge. So I decided to see for myself. After making the numerous discoveries I just shared with you, it seems that defending the non-Alcoholic “stake” would be impossible. There is however one underlying factor that is key in defending alcoholic consumption. The only thing that allows pro-alcohol’s dominance in this particular issue is the “consumption in moderation” “ingredient“. If an individual chooses to consume alcohol beyond the guidelines for moderate consumption, all the wonderful health benefits discussed earlier are not only cancelled out but are totally inversed. Medical research has shown that if an individual crosses the thin line between moderate drinking and habitual alcohol abuse it can seriously damage just about every organ in the human body. The following is a short list\* of the ailments alcohol abuser can expect: brain cells are destroyed; also, CT scans show that the brain itself actually shrinks; nerve damage can lead to impotence; toxic effects on sperm can cause infertility; a variety of liver diseases may develop, including liver cancer and potentially fatal cirrhosis; digestion is impaired; the stomach and large intestines may become inflamed, and the pancreas damaged.

I have to say that the government is not doing a very good job at educating the public about alcohol. If the government would only clearly define the difference between moderate consumption and abusive consumption and educate the public concerning the positive and negative effects of abstinence, moderate consumption, and abusive consumption instead of insulting the public’s intelligence by not trusting the public’s judgment through their oppressive means of corruptly taking the decision to drink with guilt-free conscious knowing that moderate consumption of alcohol is very healthy away from society, I think all alcohol abuse problems of America would be greatly reduced.

\*Due to the nature of this paper I will not continue with all the studies I found supporting alcohol’s many benefits when taken in moderation and the many ailments it causes when abused.