

# **THE ALCOHOL INDUSTRY AND THE UK RESEARCH AGENDA**

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*"The most dramatic trend influencing the direction of science during the past century has been its increasing dependence on funding from government and industry"*

Rampton & Stauber (2002)

*"Comparisons between industry sponsored research and independent research have demonstrated that industry sponsored research downplayed side effects and harm"*

Gotzsche (2005)

# HOW CAN THE UK ALCOHOL INDUSTRY INFLUENCE RESEARCH (AI)

- **CORE FUNDS SCIENTIFIC GROUPS**  
eg Alcohol Research Group Edinburgh
- **SOCIAL ASPECTS ORGANISATIONS (SAO) PRODUCE QUASI JOURNALS/MONOGRAPHS**  
eg International Centre for Alcohol Policy: ICAP Review
- **EVEN HIGH IMPACT FACTOR JOURNALS INDIRECTLY PART FUNDED BY THE INDUSTRY**  
eg Alcohol and Alcoholism
- **SAO OFFER ACADEMICS INDUCEMENTS TO REVIEW SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS**  
eg Alcohol and the Public Good (1994)

- The AI disputes the evidence that volume of consumption is closely linked to population harm
- The AI advocates preventative measures with no evidence of effectiveness eg, education, advertising codes
- Essentially evidence based social policy initiatives will reduce alcohol sales and profits.

# THE TEST CASE

# THE PORTMAN GROUP

- An SAO funded by the UKAI in order to speak on social aspects of alcohol
- It acts to reduce the misuse of alcohol by the "minority"
- Established in 1989 by eight leading UK drinks producers eg: Barcardi, Carlsberg, Diageo, Scottish and Newcastle, Coors Brewers UK, Pernod Ricard UK

- Publishers of the Quarterly Review of Alcohol Research describe as “a regular easily digested summary of recent research”
- First CE was John Rae (former Headmaster of Westminster School)
- Current CE is Jean Coussins appointed in 1996. Prior to this she was Director of Social Policy to the Commission for Racial Equality

# ALCOHOL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH COUNCIL (AERC)

- Established in 1982 with funds already designated to compensate pub owners whose livelihood was affected by the licensing law changes (currently £11m capital fund)
- Board has 15 members (normally a 6 year contract) appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport



- Approximately:
  - 3 are from the AI
  - 4 are educators
  - 8 are from the alcohol clinical/research community
  
- The AERC has:
  - a Code of Practice and a clear committee structure
  - Two sub committees
    - Research Committee
    - Developing People Committee

# **AERC RESEARCH PRIORITIES (2005)**

- The influence of product development and marketing on binge drinking amongst young people in the UK
- The extent to which the drinks industry adheres to current controls
- The nature of the interaction between the UK AI and the UK Government

# SAFE GUARDS - AERC

- Code of Practice which excludes industry members from the research committee
- The Research Committee decides:
  - an allocation of funding
  - selecting projects
  - reviewing applications
  - commissioning referees
  - ongoing monitoring of projects
  - dissemination of results

- The Delphic Process is used to produce annual research priorities protecting against vested interest
- In recent years the AERC has worked diligently to become transparent, democratic and unbiased in its decision making

- Jean Coussins advised Edwards, West, Babor, Hall & Marsden to "*get over it*"
- She described their advice as *a "rant"*
- She felt the journal was conducting a "*vendetta*" against the Portman Group
- She made the "*blindingly obvious point*" that she was on AERC as Jean Coussins rather than the CE of the Portman Group

# **ADDICTION ADVICE TO DEAL WITH THE “THREAT TO THE INTEGRITY OF THE SCIENCE BASE”**

- Researchers should cease to bid for AERC funds
- Researchers should not act as referees for AERC projects
- AERC board members advised to resign

# ISSUES

- **Pragmatism -v- Principle**
  - A complex world in which almost everyone has vested interests
- **Baby and Bath Water**
  - If members resign addiction research UK will lose the fund
- **Case by Case**
  - Each case a vested interest should be judged on outcomes, ie evidence based judgements

## ■ Editorial Policy of Addiction

- Do we need clarity on the journals attitude to AERC funded submissions

## ■ AERC Structure

- Is the AERC still robust, transparent and independent

## ■ Group Polarisation

- Groups move opinion from the centre ground



**THANK YOU**