



Press Statement- 17th April 2013

Psychiatrists once again call for ban on drinks industry sponsorship of sporting events

Sitting today, The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications discussed the implications of possible legislation on the banning of drinks company's sponsorship for major sporting events.

Speaking on behalf of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, in favour of the introduction of this legislation, was Dr William Flannery, Chair of the College's Faculty of Addictions Psychiatry and Consultant in Addictions Psychiatry, and Dr Eamon Keenan, member of the Faculty and Consultant in Addictions Psychiatry.

"The College has repeatedly called for the implementation of measures to reduce alcohol related harm- including pricing, reducing availability and banning the promotion of alcohol" says Dr Flannery.

In 2008 the College stated this officially with its Policy Paper calling for a ban on all alcohol advertising and sponsorship in Ireland. The paper states, particularly given the evidence of adolescent alcohol related harm, that all promotion of alcohol products should be banned. Since then, there has been additional national and international research outlining the extent of alcohol advertising targeted at adolescents.

Dr Flannery continued on this targeting: *"Organisations such as the British Medical Association has shown the powerful effects alcohol marketing and advertising has on young people and onset, amount and continuation of their drinking. Teenager's brains are still developing so drinking alcohol at this crucial stage interferes with that development and slows it down. The teen years are crucial stages for developing skills and confidence in how to deal with social situations and various problems that life throws at us. If they are consuming alcohol in these years then their ability to deal with relationships, emotional situations and life's challenges in their twenties is impaired as they may only have coped in these circumstances by using alcohol to support them"* he explained.

The scientific opinion of the 'Science Group of European Alcohol and Health Forum' found consistent evidence to demonstrate an impact of alcohol advertising on the uptake of drinking among non-drinking young people and increased consumption among existing drinkers. A survey in New Zealand found that sports people receiving direct alcohol industry sponsorship reported more hazardous drinking than those not receiving sponsorship.

Speaking from his own experience, Dr Flannery noted *"I run an addiction service in the midlands where most of the patients are dependent on alcohol, that is, alcoholics. As anyone who knows an alcoholic will know, denial is a strong feature of the illness. They are convinced they need alcohol to be normal, to be happy, and to function. I hear the same language from those who have alcohol sponsors. Without alcohol our sports, music or culture events will not happen. We need alcohol sponsorship to have major tournaments, to run our organisation, alcohol is our culture- Denial is very powerful"*.



Dr Flannery was also keen to emphasise the links between alcohol and self-harm and suicide, particularly among males. Research from the National Suicide Research Foundation in 2010 found that alcohol was involved in 24% of all cases of deliberate self-harm that is attempted suicide, rising to 44% for male cases.

Last year, proposals to curb alcohol misuse were presented by a Department of Health Steering Group, which included the phasing out of alcohol sponsorship of sporting and cultural events by 2016. The recommendation was opposed by Ireland's major sporting organisations, who pointed to the financial impact of such a move. The Committee met with heads of the FAI, The GAA and the IRFU in March, where they reiterated this point to the Committee.

It is hoped that facts such as those above will persuade the Committee and wider government that introducing this legislation, and implementing all recommendations of the Department of Health's Steering Group on a National Substance Misuse Strategy, will only be a change for the better.

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