

Running Shy on Tacking Alcohol Abuse

Sir, – The College of Psychiatry shares Brian O’Connell’s sense of exasperation with the lack of response by this and previous governments to the alcohol problem (Opinion, May 14th). The college participated on the National Substance Misuse Strategy Steering Group and continuously calls for its recommendations to be adopted as national policy.

Back in 2008, we issued a policy calling for a ban on alcohol advertising and sponsorship given the then evidence of adolescent alcohol related harm and failure of self regulation by the drinks industry. Since then, there has been additional national and international research outlining the extent of alcohol advertising that is targeted at adolescents which indicates no change since 2008. If Ireland is serious about protecting children and adolescents from alcohol related harm, urgent action must be taken to dramatically curtail their exposure to alcohol promotion via advertising and sponsorship which is outside the limits of parental guidance.

The college participated, along with the drinks industry, on the National Substance Misuse Steering Group. The college believed that all present were acting in good faith. Although the college’s policy is that all alcohol promotion should be banned, the college reached a consensus with all on the steering group to recommend a statutory framework for alcohol advertising and a phasing out of sponsorship by 2016.

It is disappointing that the drinks industry, who were at the table and given the opportunity to work to a consensus, choose to undermine the process by standing outside the group and issuing a minority report.

What is exasperating is that the Government had requested all present in the Steering group to reach a consensus but the drinks industry chose not to accede to the request from Government and yet politicians and Government are now helping the drinks industry to launch their publications.

Where do we go from here? – Yours, etc,

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