



Three “baby boomers” who have admitted to drinking too much: political adviser Alastair Campbell and TV personalities Clarissa Dickson Wright and Keith Chegwin

College issues guidance to identify substance and alcohol misuse among older people

Jacqui Wise LONDON

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is urging GPs to incorporate screening for alcohol and substance misuse into general health assessments of people aged over 60. The college has published a new guideline that aims to reduce the threat of alcohol related brain damage to older people and the high rate of suicide in this age group.¹

Alcohol misuse is linked to self harm and suicide. The 80-84 age group has the United Kingdom’s highest suicide rate, with over 20 in every 100 000 people taking their own lives in 2012. The “baby boomers,” born between 1946 and 1964, have had higher suicide rates at any age than in any other generation and are now at risk of alcohol and drug misuse.

The college pointed out that even low alcohol intake might cause problems for elderly people because of reduced liver metabolism and

because of a lower ratio of body water to fat. The highest prevalence of alcohol related brain damage is found in the 50-60 age group, the college warned. Alcohol related brain damage can affect memory, judgment and reasoning, problem solving skills, and understanding.

The guidance highlights the fact that only 6-7% of high risk people with substance misuse problems over 60 years of age get the treatment they need. Although people in this age group are less likely than younger adults to complain of a substance problem and are more likely to have mild dependence, they are also more likely than younger adults to be motivated to abstain. It points out that because older people are more often in contact with the healthcare system than younger groups there are more opportunities to identify substance misuse.

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Orthopaedic surgeon who botched four operations while working as a locum is struck off

Clare Dyer THE BMJ

A surgeon whose attempt to repair a fractured ankle was called “a spectacular failure” by one consultant and “a frightening example of orthopaedic surgery” by another has been struck off the UK medical register.

Gladys Johnson-Ogbunike, who qualified in Nigeria, botched four operations in 2010 and 2011 while working as a locum registrar in trauma and orthopaedics at South London Healthcare NHS Trust, a Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service panel found. One consultant, Mr B, who had previously worked with her, refused to let her operate

on any of his patients, and she was assigned to work with another consultant, Mr O.

Two of Johnson-Ogbunike’s bungled operations were hip hemiarthroplasties. In one, performed on Patient A, she was unable to remove the fractured femoral head out of the hip socket, and the operation had to be completed by Mr B. In the second, on Patient D, she did not cut the femoral neck correctly, made two other errors, and made a hole in the femur.

When carrying out a fixation by dynamic hip screw on Patient C she inserted the screw too far, into the pelvic bone, but she refused to

Medical Journal of Australia editor sacked over opposition to Elsevier outsourcing

Marie Mcinerney MELBOURNE

The editor in chief of the *Medical Journal of Australia* (MJA) has been sacked over his opposition to the outsourcing of the journal’s subediting and production functions to the global publishing company Elsevier.

The dismissal of the respected Australian medical academic Stephen Leeder last Wednesday prompted the resignation of 19 members of the journal’s editorial advisory committee and the journal’s senior deputy editor, Tania Janusic. The medical editor of the online newsletter *MJA InSight*, Ruth Armstrong, has also given notice over the decision.

Two committee members, Gary Wittert and Michael Horowitz, both professors at the University of Adelaide, said, “We consider that the MJA was extremely fortunate to have the services of an editor of this calibre and regard his stewardship of the MJA to have been exceptional.” They said that they expected Australia’s medical profession to be “appropriately outraged” by the sacking of Leeder by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company, a fully owned subsidiary of the Australian Medical Association. They also said that they were “appalled” at the way Leeder was dismissed, a process he described as “pretty brutal.”

“It was the most humiliating professional experience I’ve ever had... being marched up to my office and supervised (while I packed up my desk) and then marched out of the building as if I was a 10 year old with my hands caught in the cookie jar,” said Leeder, who is an emeritus professor of public health and community medicine at the University of Sydney.

The Australian Medical Association and the Australasian Medical Publishing Company disputed the account but without giving details. They said that



Stephen Leeder was editor since 2013

the journal needed operational efficiencies to secure its future.

All but two of the 21 members of the editorial advisory committee have resigned, saying that the publishing company’s handling of the outsourcing process raised serious questions about the future and reputation of the 101 year old peer reviewed journal.

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risk of developing arthritis.

Another consultant, Mr W, told the panel that it was “a frightening example of orthopaedic surgery.”

Mr F told the panel that Johnson-Ogbunike did not accept that the outcome was “disastrous” for the patient. She had also claimed that Mr F supervised the procedure, which the panel found was an example of her “deliberately lying.”

Priya Iyer, chairing the panel, told her, “You appear to be totally unable to ever accept that you have made any mistakes in the cases before this panel. That fact itself presents a particular danger to patients.”

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2366

RESEARCH NEWS

LUNG CANCER

Sustained statin therapy is linked with lower mortality

Patients with lung cancer who have had more than 12 prescriptions for statins after their diagnosis have a significantly lower risk of death from the disease than patients who don't take statins, concludes a study that researchers say supports further investigation into this group of drugs as adjuvant cancer therapy.

The study, published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, identified 14 689 patients in the English cancer registry who had been given a new diagnosis of lung cancer between 1998 and 2009.¹ Of these, 3638 patients with at least one year of follow-up after their lung cancer diagnosis were then cross referenced with the UK Clinical Practice Research Datalink to allow analysis of the drugs they had been prescribed.

The results showed that taking a statin after a diagnosis of lung cancer was associated with an 11% lower risk of lung cancer specific mortality, in comparison with not taking a statin, though this was not statistically significant (adjusted hazard ratio 0.89 (95% confidence interval 0.78 to 1.02); $P=0.09$). But the reduction in lung cancer specific mortality was statistically significant after 12 prescriptions for statins, with a risk nearly a fifth lower than in people not taking a statin (adjusted hazard ratio 0.81 (0.67 to 0.98); $P=0.03$).

Studies have shown potential anticancer effects of statins, including inhibition of cell proliferation and stimulation of anticancer immune surveillance; and epidemiological studies have shown reduced recurrence and cancer deaths in breast, prostate, and colorectal cancers.

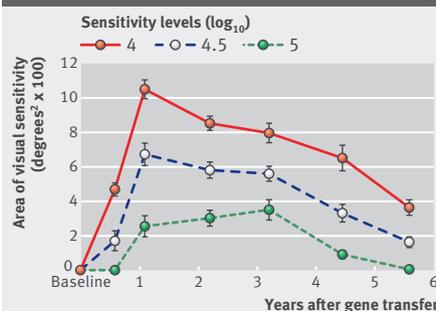
Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2382

INHERITED BLINDNESS

Gene therapy improves eyesight in short term

Gene therapy for an inherited disorder that causes vision loss in childhood improves eyesight for one to three years, but the benefits then diminish, two early studies have shown.

The studies, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*,^{1,2} treated people with Leber's congenital amaurosis, a group of conditions that cause blindness early in life owing to mutations in at least 19 different genes. Study participants received retinal injections of a harmless viral vector carrying DNA for the *RPE65* gene, which codes for an enzyme in the retinal pigment epithelium that

Long term change in area of visual sensitivity

catalyses a key step in the visual cycle. Around 5-10% of people with Leber's congenital amaurosis have mutations in this gene.

The first study,¹ carried out in the United States, treated 15 people with *RPE65* associated Leber's congenital amaurosis. The results showed rapid improvement in light sensitivity that was detectable within the first month of treatment. This improvement was maintained at one year, and the area of the patients' retinas responding to light expanded at three years. But area of improved vision decreased at 4.5 years in one patient and at six years in two other patients (all were aged 16 to 23 years).

The second study,² carried out in the United Kingdom, showed similar results. Retinal sensitivity improved for up three years in 6 of 12 patients treated with gene therapy.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2376

BREAST CANCER

Breast feeding reduces risk of recurrence by a third

Women treated for breast cancer who previously breast fed their babies have a 30% lower risk of recurrence than those who did not, a US study has shown. Breast feeding for six months or more was associated with even greater protection from tumour recurrence.

The study, reported in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, analysed information on 1636 women with breast cancer from two prospective breast cancer cohorts.¹ The women each completed a questionnaire that included their history of breast feeding, and their tumour subtype was determined using the PAM50 gene expression assay.

Results showed that women who had ever breast fed had a 30% lower risk of recurrence than women who had not (hazard ratio 0.70 (95% confidence interval 0.53 to 0.93)), and an even lower risk was found in those who had breast fed for six months or longer (0.63 (0.46 to 0.87); P for trend 0.01). Similar associations were seen in breast cancer deaths.

Women with basal-like tumours (high grade, triple negative tumours) were less likely to have previously breast fed than those with luminal A tumours (odds ratio 0.56 (95% confidence interval 0.39 to 0.80)), which are less likely to metastasise, are treatable with hormonal therapy such as tamoxifen, and generally have better outcomes.

Breast feeding was associated with reduced recurrence (hazard ratio 0.52 (0.31 to 0.89)) and death (0.52 (0.29 to 0.93)) from breast cancer in women with luminal A tumours but not other subtypes.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2325

DIET

Small changes could achieve big environmental benefits

Making even relatively small changes to current UK diets could have a substantial effect on the environment and the population's health, two research papers have claimed.^{1,2}

The UK has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% from their 1990 levels by 2050, and some say that this should include a 70% reduction in emissions from the food industry.

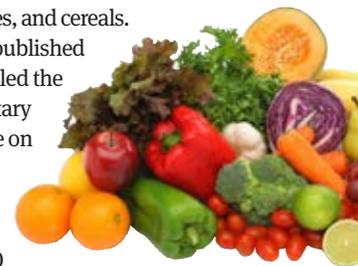
Research published in the journal *Climatic Change* estimated the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the average diet by using data on 1571 adults from the UK's national diet and nutrition survey from 2008 to 2011.

The researchers compared these with diets modified to meet World Health Organization recommendations so that they contained less red meat, dairy products, eggs, and sweet or savoury snacks but contained more cereals, fruit, and vegetables.

The study concluded that, if the average UK diet conformed to WHO recommendations, greenhouse gases would be reduced by 17%. Further reductions of around 40% could be achieved by making realistic modifications to diets so that they contained even fewer animal products and processed snacks but contained more fruit, vegetables, and cereals.

A second paper, published in *BMJ Open*, modelled the effect that these dietary changes would have on the health of the UK population. If the average UK diet complied with WHO recommendations, the researchers found, this would increase the average life expectancy by 12 months in men and by four months in women.

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▶ References and full versions of news stories are on thebmj.com



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▶ Digoxin is linked to raised risk of death in patients with atrial fibrillation

MEPs call for new alcohol strategy and calorie display on labels of alcoholic drinks

Rory Watson BRUSSELS

Members of the European Parliament are pressing the European Commission to produce a new wide ranging strategy to tackle alcohol related harm in Europe. The MEPs said that the strategy should include draft legislation to be tabled at the latest next year requiring the energy content of alcoholic beverages to be clearly labelled across the European Union. Alcohol is currently excluded from food labelling laws that apply to all other products.

The MEPs also gave their support to the possibility of using a minimum price on a unit of alcohol to curb the sale of very cheap alcohol. The Scottish government took a lead in this area by approving the necessary legislation in 2012. However, it delayed introducing the measure after opponents, including the Scotch Whisky Association, called for the legislation to be reviewed. The case is currently before the European Court of Justice, which is expected to give its legal opinion later this year.

In their resolution, adopted by a show of hands at the parliament in Strasbourg on 29 April, the MEPs called on national governments “to carefully consider the appropriateness of introducing national policy aimed at preventing the sale of very cheap alcohol, provided that such measures ensure the effective protection of health.”

Commenting on the calorie labelling demand, Glenis Willmott, Labour’s European health spokeswoman, said, “Many people don’t realise how many calories are in alcohol. Consumers have a right to know that a glass of wine has

the same number of calories as a slice of cake.” She insisted that the initiative did not aim to tell people what to do but to give them the information necessary to make an informed choice. “This is by no means an extreme measure and is actually supported by the brewers of Europe,” she added.

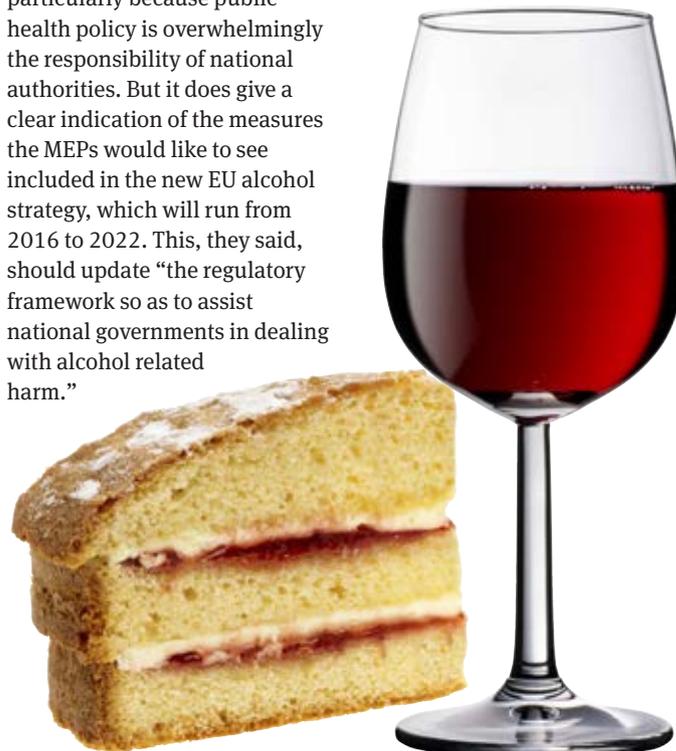
The MEPs also want to see the European Commission table parallel legislation by 2016 at the latest on displaying labels warning pregnant women not to drink alcohol. And they want consideration given to EU-wide labelling warning of the dangers of drinking and driving.

The non-binding resolution does not commit the commission to come forward with the various initiatives identified by the MEPs, particularly because public health policy is overwhelmingly the responsibility of national authorities. But it does give a clear indication of the measures the MEPs would like to see included in the new EU alcohol strategy, which will run from 2016 to 2022. This, they said, should update “the regulatory framework so as to assist national governments in dealing with alcohol related harm.”

The parliamentary resolution came just a week after EU health ministers at an informal meeting in Riga confirmed their support for the EU alcohol strategy’s priorities: pricing and tax measures, marketing and restrictions on the availability of alcoholic beverages, legal measures to reduce drink driving, and raising of public awareness. “To achieve the objectives set out in the global plan to reduce . . . alcohol related harm by 10%, it is important to continue to work together,” the ministers said.

▶ **Personal View:** Alcoholic drinks contribute to obesity and should come with mandatory calorie counts (*BMJ* 2015;350:h2047)

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;350:h2390



A slice of sponge cake and a large glass of wine each have about 180-190 calories

IN BRIEF

Blood protein change detects ovarian cancer: A new test that estimated a woman’s risk of ovarian cancer by the speed at which the level of the blood protein CA125 increases has been found to be 85.8% sensitive and 99.8% specific (*BMJ* 2015;350:h2367). Over 13 years 154 of more than 200000 women studied were found to have ovarian or tubal cancers. Conventional testing using a CA125 cut-off of >35 U/mL would have identified 41% of the cancers.

Rubella is eliminated from the Americas: The endemic transmission of rubella has been eliminated in the American continent, the Pan American Health Organization has announced (*BMJ* 2015;350:h2348).

Each year up to 20000 children were born with congenital rubella syndrome in Latin America and the Caribbean before mass vaccination started in 1998.

Review of guidance on assisted suicide moves step closer: The High Court has given a campaigner against assisted dying the go ahead to seek a judicial review of amended guidance from the director of public prosecutions for England and Wales stating that doctors who aid a suicide are not likely to be prosecuted unless the person committing suicide was the doctor’s own patient. Nikki Kenward, who is disabled and uses a wheelchair, is supported by the Christian Legal Centre.

First natural birth for diabetes patient with artificial pancreas: A woman with type 1 diabetes has given birth naturally after using an artificial pancreas while pregnant. She was taking part in the Closed Loop in Pregnancy study testing the device, which constantly monitors blood glucose and delivers insulin to optimise glucose control, in pregnancy.



CNRI/SPL