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Increased treatment rates of alcohol dependence can save almost 12,000 lives

A new study documents for the first time the benefits of increased treatment rates of alcohol dependence in the EU. 11,700 lives could be saved annually if 40 per cent of patients were treated.

Thousands of Europeans die from alcohol dependence every year because they are not treated for their disease. Less than 10 per cent of patients with alcohol dependence in the EU currently receive treatment, and every year the disease is responsible for the deaths of about 120,000 Europeans between 15 and 64 years. If treatment rates were extended to 40 per cent of patients, it is estimated that the lives of 11,700 patients could be saved each year.

The benefits of increased treatment rates of alcohol dependence in the EU are described in a new study, which is published in the February issue of the medical journal *European Neuropsychopharmacology*¹. The study documents for the first time the deadly consequences of alcohol dependence and the limited treatment of the disease in the EU. A research team led by Professor Jürgen Rehm from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, University of Toronto, conducted the newly published study.

Huge burden

The new study also quantifies for the first time to what extent the increase in overall mortality caused by alcohol consumption is directly attributable to the disease of alcohol dependence. Alcohol dependence was found to be responsible for 70 per cent of all deaths caused by alcohol.

The social costs of alcohol consumption are wide-ranging and can include crime, traffic accidents, unemployment and family issues such as child neglect and divorce. The cost to society has been estimated at 155.8bn euros in 2010, and 62 per cent of these costs are thought to result from heavy drinking associated with alcohol dependence².

The study makes it clear that increased treatment of alcohol dependence is essential in order to reduce alcohol's overall contribution to disease and mortality. Not as a replacement for existing alcohol policies in the EU, but in addition to the proven alcohol policy measures such as increasing price, banning advertising, or restricting availability of alcohol.

Based on the survey results, Professor Rehm urges increased focus on treatment of alcohol dependence alongside prevention to ensure an integrated approach to alcohol dependence is developed and implemented.

“Given the substantial health burden in Europe attributable to alcohol consumption and, in particular, to alcohol dependence, current alcohol policy prevention measures should be supplemented with measures to expand treatment coverage” says Professor Rehm.

Lundbeck has supported the study by an unrestricted educational grant.

About alcohol dependence

Alcohol dependence is a brain disease with a high probability of following a progressive course.^{3,4} Alcohol is toxic to most organs of the body, and the level of consumption is strongly correlated with the risk for long-term morbidity and mortality.⁵ Alcohol is a causal factor in more than 60 types of disease and injury.⁶ Genetic and environmental factors are important in the development of alcohol dependence; genetic factors account for an estimated 60% of the risk of developing the disease.⁷ A central characteristic of alcohol dependence is the often overpowering desire to consume alcohol. Patients experience difficulties in controlling the consumption of alcohol and continue consuming alcohol despite harmful consequences.⁸

Excessive alcohol consumption is common in many parts of the world, especially in Europe where more than 14 million people are alcohol dependent.⁹ and where the treatment gap is very large, with only 8% of patients receiving any treatment.¹⁰ Both abstinence and reduction goals should be considered as part of a comprehensive treatment approach for patients with alcohol dependence.¹¹

Further information, including contact to Professor Rehm and the full study

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About Lundbeck

Lundbeck is a global pharmaceutical company highly committed to improving the quality of life of people living with brain diseases. For this purpose, Lundbeck is engaged in the entire value chain throughout research, development, production, marketing and sales of pharmaceuticals across the world. The company's products are targeted at disorders such as depression and anxiety, psychotic disorders, epilepsy, Huntington's, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Lundbeck's pipeline consists of several mid- to late- stage development programs.

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