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2 August 2017

Dear Fellow Doctor,

Sport and Alcohol Don't Go Together

This year's Sport For All Day will be organised on August 6 (Sunday) and we take this opportunity to call on you to adopt an active lifestyle and to encourage your patients and clients to participate in daily physical activity for health.

While sports participation creates a positive and healthy impact on life and society, alcohol use does not. It has come to our attention that an alcohol-fueled event titled Beer Run 2017 will be held later this year. As such, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance and need for leading an active, alcohol-free lifestyle.

Alcohol serves no role in sports participation and may pose a negative effect. Alcohol causes fluid loss via the kidneys and increases dehydration. Alcohol is a neurotoxin and sedative, which affects sports performance and psychomotor precision in terms of reaction time, balance and hand-eye coordination. Depending on the nature, context and setting of the exercise concerned, alcohol use predisposes to injury, accidents and even death. While drinking before sport may interfere with the way the body produces energy, regular use of alcohol puts on body weight because of its caloric content which is close to that of fat, weight for weight.

Outside sports, alcohol has been identified as a leading risk factor for death and disability globally, accounting for 3.3 million deaths every year. Alcohol use contributes to more than 200 disease and injury conditions, notably alcohol dependence, liver cirrhosis, cancers and injuries. Furthermore, emerging evidence corroborates the causal link between alcohol and cancer of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver, colon, rectum, female breast, and increasingly stomach cancer, with the risk increasing steadily with greater volumes of drinking. Contrary to what suppliers and consumers would like to make-believe, there is NO safe drinking level.

People who drink may think that alcohol is protective of the heart. While some studies in the West may suggest this is the case, evidence to date remains controversial as study findings must be interpreted with caution due to methodological constraints and possible scientific flaws. In fact, the World Health Organization never recommends alcohol drinking to protect against cardiovascular diseases.

Drinking puts people's health, family and society at stake. Whereas the World Health Organization maintains that the alcohol industry should have no role in formulating health policies and programmes, it is also important for health professionals to uphold zero ties with the Big Alcohol. I therefore appeal to you to **refrain from encouraging, facilitating or allowing alcohol to associate with your professional practice. It is also important not to associate alcohol with sports and exercise participation, as its effects are counter-productive on health.** You can find more information about “Alcohol and Health” on the Change4Health website (https://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol_aware).

We have an absolute responsibility to serve as role models for members of our community. I look forward to continuing our partnerships for the betterment of public health.

Yours faithfully,



(Dr. Regina Ching)
for Director of Health