HEALTH IN ACTION

Problems of alcohol often overlooked in inner city

PAUL B. CORNELY, M.D.

We read a lot these days about drug abuse, but one of the most serious problems in the ghetto is often overlooked. It is the misuse of alcohol. Even though this column is not designed to explore specific diseases, this is one that is of critical importance in the inner city.

DR. PAUL CORNELY

John Boone, former director of the Southern Regional Council Project on Crime and Corrections, has remarked that upper-class alcoholics sanatoria, middle-class alcoholics go to clinics, lower-class whites go to jail for a few days, but lower-class blacks get longer jail sentences.

I want to discuss this disease of alcohol because the delivery of medical care is involved.

Alcoholism is not solely a porblem of the inner city, it is one that exists every where. It is the third major public health problem in the United States. Fully 70 percent of our population consumes alcoholic beverages.

Here are some other interesting data: People who drink are likely to be under 55 years of age, to be white collar or professionals, and to have an income of at least $7,000 a year.

So when we talk about having some 6 million problem drinkers in this country, we are not talking just about the black and the poor; we are talking about all races, poor and rich, people with families and jobs. After all, 85 percent of problem drinkers are working people and only 15 percent end up on skid row.

I want to be sure that all people with drinking problems — or potential alcoholics — in every community, whether they be in suburbia or the central city, will have facilities for adequate care. This is not now the case.

Alcoholics in the inner city get the short end of the stick, as they do in so many other instances. But their treatment is crucial to the inner city and to society as a whole. That is why you've got to find out how this is handled in your community.

Ghetto drinking patterns have been studied and some interesting statistics have emerged. For example, there is a higher ratio of black to white drinkers, even though sizable numbers are found in both races.

Also, unfortunately, people are beginning to drink at younger ages. Blacks acquire arrest records for public intoxication at a younger age than previously.

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Of course, the high statistics on drinking problems among blacks may only mean that because blacks are poor, they cannot hide in private physician's offices or private sanatoria and thereby avoid being counted, as can white persons.

One must also emphasize that the worst record of ethnic groups is not held by black Americans. Reports indicate that American Indians and Irish-Americans lead the list.

There are social reasons for the high use of liquor in ghetto areas. The environment is depressing and frustrating with high unemployment and overcrowding. Liquor stores and bars are found in large numbers there and the young people early become accustomed to seeing alcohol used in their homes and neighborhoods.

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Ghetto children almost daily see it used in the streets, in parked cars, and in the bars and taverns as they walk past. Sometimes they enter places, where liquor is consumed to get change or to buy cookies and ice cream or other things for the home.

Some girls are given alcohol in an effort to teach them to control it so they won't be easy sex targets for boys who use drink to tear down resistance. For young or old, alcohol in the ghetto is often a crutch to give one a feeling of importance or attractiveness. It is seen as making one "ready" or "right." Unfortunately, too much "wastes" one.

Of the many things experts suggest to alter significantly the pattern of alcoholism in the ghetto, probably better economic opportunities, especially for the males, would result in the most dramatic changes.

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But what should a community do? The American Public Health Association has published a manual in which they suggest ways to help prevent alcoholism.

Some are that more extensive instruction be given in educational institutions; citizens' organizations be used to make studies and attempt to influence people against excessive use of alcohol; regulatory bodies act in light of the current concepts of behavior and social structure; community health departments work toward the improvement of environmental conditions to lessen resort to alcohol.

Blacks can and should be identified as an important target group for an effective program in the prevention and control of alcoholism.

Why not check in your community to see if it is facing up to the alcohol problem. Some people believe the great interest in drug abuse today is because white youngsters have joined blacks as big users. Will we wait for the same thing to happen before attacking the problem of alcoholism?

GARY, IND.'S Mayor Richard Hatcher, left, was in Baltimore recently to address graduates of Coppin State Teachers' College. Here, in this AFRO photo by Ben Phillips, he chats with Baltimore city councilman, Robert Marshall (D-4th).

Carl Adair receives doctor of laws degree

CARL M. ADAIR

BALTIMORE — Carl M. Adair, an acting department head in the Baltimore Public School System, recently received the honorary degree of doctor of laws at ceremonies held at Morris College.

Dr. Adair, a native of Exmore, Va., and his wife Merlene are the parents of three girls ranging from six months to 10 years old.

Among the other awards and honors received by Dr. Adair are the all-conference certificate of the Eastern Inter-Collegiate Association Conference Football, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the Outstanding Young Man of America award, 1966, Library of Congress, and Alumnus of the year award from Virginia State College in 1967.

A member of many community, political and professional organizations, Adair receive the A.S. degree from Norfolk State College in Industrial Education in 1954, and the bachelors degree in Vocational Industrial education in 1956.

He has done further study at the University of Maryland in advanced education and received the master of education degree from Coppin State College this year.

Ambassador calls for racial truce

WESTERVILLE, Ohio — Dr. John Akar, ambassador of Sierra Leone to the United States, called for a truce "to allow America to create a genuine climate conducive to fraternal dialogue among all the opposing factions."

Ambassador Akar was the commencement speaker at Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio, a church oriented college that has maintained links with Sierra Leone since 1855.

Dr. Akar told the 1970 graduating class: "I think that the time has now come for us to call a truce in America. It is all well and good to say that washing our linens in public is reflective of the qualitative merit of our democratic political ideology.

"But when we wash our linens in a manner and with methods that destroy our linens and leave us without any more linens to wash, then we expose ourselves to a predictable collapse from within."

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The Ambassador went on: "Let us call a truce at all levels, involving everybody, however crucial your profile and however humble your role. Americans need time to pick-up the seeming shattered threads to put them together again. White is not the color of the devil, nor is black the color of degradation.

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"Black is beautiful does not necessarily mean that white is ugly. Yours is an interracial society and the sooner everybody appreciated this crucial trusim, the better it would be for the kind of America some of her friends, like me, would like to see, — an America at peace with herself with a place in the sun for all its people.

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The Ambassador who received a deafening ovation and an honorary Doctor of Laws degree said: "I refuse to believe that God gave us hands only to clasp them in attitudes of defiance and violence, rather than in the dignified, satisfying attitude of prayer; or the cordial, fraternal, outstretched attitude of friendship, inviting the embrace of other equally outstretched hands similarly extended."

Ambassador Akar was a student at Otterbein College from 1947 to 1949 before he went to the University of Calfiornia at Berkeley where he graduated in 1950 with a major in Political Science.

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By the way...

by Joe Black

Sometimes you can learn what to do in the future by finding out what you did wrong in the past. During the 1960's we saw strikes, boycotts, fires and riots. There were shoot-outs and head-bustings between police and militant protestors. The '60's also saw the birth of a new vocabulary featuring words like: uptight, hippy, yippee, establishment, trip, acid, love-in, Black Power, racist, rap and oreo. There were assassinations of great and respected people like John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Medgar Evers, Doctor Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X. There was the miracle of our "MAN ON THE MOON"...as well as a few minor miracles like the New York Mets winning Baseball's World Championship; Willy Mays slamming home run number 600, and the New York Jets annexing the title of World Champions of Football.

Overall, our great American melting pot did a lot of boiling, stewing and burning. It remains to be seen whether anyone really learned anything from the experience. The '60's also revealed that there are too many among us who still believe that good can come from evil. That murder can earn respect. And that burning, looting and destroying will somehow make things right. It never has. And it never will!

I still believe that one home run from the bat of Willy Mays...or the memory of a man like Doctor Martin Luther King...can do more to further the cause of the black man's future in a single stroke than a million looters can do in a lifetime.

Joe Black
Vice President
The Greyhound Corporation

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