

Warning on Celtic Tiger's alcohol problems

Anita Guidera

IRISH people need to drink less and avoid getting drunk, to avoid alcohol-related illness or injury, the National Alcohol Policy Adviser has warned.

Dr Ann Hope told the MacGill Summer School last night the main problem related to alcohol in Ireland was simply that adults were drinking too much.

"While measures to tackle under-age drinking are necessary and important, the fact remains that the impact of hazardous drinking among adults constitutes the major alcohol related problem right now in Ireland," she said.

And she pointed out that serving alcohol to a drunk person has been against the law since 1872.

Alcohol consumption continues to increase rapidly in Ireland. Since 1993, per capita consumption has risen by 35pc.

Many adult social drinkers who drink too much on a given night, fill Accident and Emergency departments, especially on weekends, with alcohol related injuries due to fights, falls, drunken collapses, and road accidents, she said.

Drink was a growing factor in public order offences, assaults, drink driving offences, accidental falls

and suicides, she continued. Dr Hope called for an examination of the Irish cultural tolerance of drinking to intoxication as part of a "good night out".

The slowdown in the economic boom would provide breathing space for debate on measures that would effectively reduce alcohol related problems in Ireland, she said. These must influence both supply of and demand for alcohol.

Pressures on young people to drink must be reduced and the onset of drinking among children must be delayed, she said.

Co Mayo Coroner Dr Michael Loftus claimed that alcohol abuse is as devastating to communities in Ireland today as emigration was to the same communities in the past.

Dr Loftus, one of the country's most outspoken voices on the abuse of alcohol, called for a zero tolerance policy in relation to drink driving where no level of alcohol in the blood stream would be acceptable.

He also questioned the level of involvement of the drinks industry in the sponsorship of major sporting events and festivals.

He added that most upsetting of all was the devastation caused in families by the loss of a loved one in accidents caused by drink.

Irish Ind. 17/8/01/84

Noonan 'sorry' for his role in McCole tragedy

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FINE Gael leader, Michael Noonan, has said he would like to meet the McCole family to convey his regret over his role in the high profile case surrounding the illness and death of Brigid McCole from Hepatitis C.

The mother of 12 died in 1997 during a High Court battle with the Blood Transfusion Service Board following her refusal to accept an offer of compensation. Mrs McCole had been injected with infected Anti-D on November 5, 1977.

Just two weeks before she died, the BTSB admitted liability and negligence and apologised for infecting her but threatened that if she was to proceed with a case for damages and not succeed they would pursue her for costs.

Health Minister at the time Michael Noonan, who is currently touring Co Donegal, said yesterday he now regrets his role in the affair.

"The McCole affair was a great tragedy for the family and I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere sympathy and regret for my role in that," he said.

He admitted that at the time he listened to legal advice which said the Government should let the BTSB pursue the case.

"In retrospect I should have interfered and taken a political decision to get involved."

Mr Noonan said he had never met the family directly and would like to do so, but added it was something he would like to do in a private capacity.

The Fine Gael leader criticised the present Government's handling of the Jamie Synott case.

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Ben Wallace (5) from with Enable Ireland.

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Rev George Knowd

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