



THE SOBERING TRUTH

What You Don't Know *Can Kill You*

SECOND EDITION

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. HERTEN

AN INTERVIEW

WHY DID YOU WRITE THIS BOOK?

When I achieved sobriety, I was so grateful that I made a commitment to help others find their way out of the abyss that is alcohol addiction. I began studying the medical effects of alcohol and was truly astounded at what I learned. There is a huge amount of scientific literature on the adverse physical consequences of drinking about which the general public is entirely unaware. I was in a unique position as a recovering alcoholic and as a doctor to bring these facts to light.

FOR WHOM DID YOU WRITE IT?

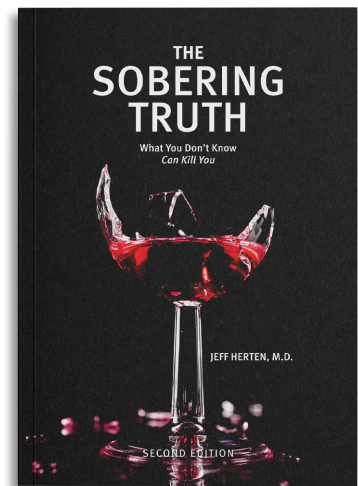
Initially, I wanted to help the alcoholic that still suffers. Then, as I uncovered the vast literature on the negative health consequences, I wanted to inform every person who drinks because they have been told it is healthful for them. I wanted to inform them that they had been misled, that there are incredible health hazards to drinking of which they are uninformed. Then, finally, I wrote it for the loved ones of alcoholics, so that they might find hope and form-late strategies to help their alcoholic get sober.

COULD YOU ELABORATE ON THESE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES?

The list is extensive. Alcohol contributes to the causation of nine different kinds of cancer, namely mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach, colon, rectum, liver, prostate, and breast. There is circumstantial evidence that it may cause pancreas cancer as well. Alcohol is a major cause of osteoporosis. It causes immune suppression, worsens allergies, contributes to high blood pressure, increases the risk of stroke, diabetes, causes nerve degeneration that may lead to neuropathy, and is a leading cause of insomnia. The list goes on and on.

COULD YOU EXPLAIN HOW ALCOHOL CAUSES INSOMNIA?

If a person drinks in the evening, the alcohol has a suppressive effect on the central nervous system and the person falls asleep



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An Interview with Dr. Herten, *Continued*

AN INTERVIEW

easily. The alcohol wears off in two to four hours and there is a rebound hyperactivity of the brain that wakes the person up. S/He can't go back to sleep.

WHAT MOST SURPRISED YOU ABOUT WHAT YOU LEARNED RESEARCHING THE BOOK?

What surprised me is the enormous disconnect between what the scientific and medical research shows to be the incredible hazards of alcohol, and the public perception of alcohol as being beneficial to a person's health. Over time it became obvious that there is a vigorous campaign underway by the alcohol industry to publicize only the positive research findings about alcohol. The negative results rarely find their way onto the front page of the newspaper or the network news. I am hesitant to use the "C" word (conspiracy), as it is understandable that the alcohol industry would bring to light information that would help to sell their product. But, very much like tobacco three or four decades ago, someone has to present the other side of the story.

WHO IS MOST HARMED BY ALCOHOL?

It would seem obvious that the drinker is the person most harmed by alcohol, and that may be true in the long term, but the health problems that are harmful to the alcoholic take years to develop. In the meantime, the close family members of the alcoholic suffer most. The alcoholic is not emotionally available to them. Alcoholics are self-centered and selfish; the highest priority in their life is alcohol. Young children are the most vulnerable and the emotional deprivation that they suffer as a result of having an alcoholic parent creates neurologic changes in their brains that make them more susceptible to addiction as adults.

WHY DO MOST PEOPLE THINK THAT DRINKING IS GOOD FOR THEIR HEALTH?

The makers and marketers of alcohol have done a masterful job of creating the impression that alcohol is very beneficial for one's health. With deliberate intention, every shred of science that hints at alcohol being healthful ends up on network news. Meanwhile, a huge body of scientific evidence that proves just the opposite never sees the light of public awareness. There is also considerable denial on the part of the average person. Let's face it: most people like to drink. They don't want to hear negative information about alcohol. If they hear it, they don't want to believe it.

WHAT IS THE MOST COMMON HEALTH PROBLEM CAUSED BY ALCOHOL?

There are so many common health problems with alcohol that it is difficult to single one out. However, I would have to say that depression is probably the most common and least recognized.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO QUIT DRINKING?

Alcohol is hard to quit because it makes us feel good. It calms our fears, it makes us feel okay about ourselves, and it lightens our mood...temporarily. Those feelings are so satisfying that we want to experience it over and over. But biochemical and neurologic changes with continued drinking make that harder to achieve. So we try harder, we drink more, and we achieve less. We are truly addicted.