

QAADRANT

Winter 2020

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



Dry Januarys

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and that really helped' pages 3-4*

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Drugs

United States: During the election, several states included referenda on drugs law reforms. Arizona, Montana, New Jersey and South Dakota supported the legalisation of recreational cannabis, whilst South Dakota and Mississippi approved the legalisation of medicinal cannabis. Perhaps the most significant changes were in Oregon where voters agreed with the proposed therapeutic use of psilocybin ('magic mushrooms') and the decriminalisation of several 'hard' drugs, including possession of small amounts of cocaine and heroin.

In Washington DC, around three quarters of the capital's voters supported the decriminalisation of psilocybin and other psychedelic substances. The Council will now review the outcome and, if approved, it will be passed to Congress.

New Zealand: A non-binding referendum, included in the recent general election, asked voters if they wanted to pass a bill to legalise and regulate the use and sale of cannabis for people aged 20 and above. The result was very close: 50.7% against and 48.4% supporting reform.

Alcohol

Calorie labelling: *'Tackling obesity: empowering adults and children to live healthier lives'*, the government's recent obesity strategy, includes a consultation on its intention to make drinks companies provide calorie labelling on alcohol. A spokesperson confirmed that COVID-19 has been a 'wake up call' to address the country's long-standing weight-related health problems. Drinkaware estimates that alcohol accounts for nearly 10% of the total calorie intake of people who drink¹.

COVID-19's impact on health behaviours – a new study University College London, Public Health England and Cancer Research UK have launched a joint study to explore the pandemic's impact on health behaviours that contribute most to avoidable deaths in the UK, including poor diet, excessive alcohol use, low physical activity, and smoking tobacco.

Researchers hope that the findings will help to support people in making better health-protective choices during and following the pandemic.

Gambling

Review of the 2005 Gambling Act: The long-awaited review by the Department for Digital, Community, Media and Sport (DCMS) has been delayed yet again. However, the Guardian² has reported that the Prime Minister and his advisors have now taken control of the review and are likely to recommend 'sweeping reforms' of the industry.

The Peers for Gambling Reform Group was founded in September. Chaired by Lord Foster of Bath, around 150 peers have joined to date. Lord Foster said that online gambling companies have '*cached in on the pandemic, making more profit and putting more lives at risk*'. He called for urgent government action to reform '*our wholly outdated regulation*'.

Wales: Medical experts and academics have written to the Welsh Government calling for a specialist gambling addiction clinic to be opened in Wales. The letter was written by Professor Simon Dymond (Swansea University) and endorsed by leading experts and members of the Senedd's cross-party group on problem gambling. Professor Dymond expressed concern about increased gambling activity by problem gamblers during lockdown, and heightened risks for young people, particularly 18-25 year olds. Wynford Ellis Owen (CAIS³) charity said: '*Problem gambling now is where alcohol misuse was in the '50s and '60s...having the service delivered by the NHS would open the door for many more people who are suffering in silence*'

Footnotes

1 <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/alcohol-and-calories/key-calorie-counting-facts>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/20/downing-street-to-spearhead-gambling-reforms-say-insiders>

3 CAIS is a Welsh addictions and mental health charity: <https://www.cais.co.uk/>



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The Nature of the Beast – addiction and how we can stand up to it

Saturday 23rd January 2021

We are very pleased to announce that QAAD's first online event will take place in the New Year. The free, half-day seminar will be run via Zoom and we hope that old Friends and new will join us from all corners of the country.



Our guest speaker is the leading addictions academic, clinical psychologist and author Professor Jim Orford, (Emeritus Professor of Clinical & Community Psychology, Birmingham University). Jim will talk about the key factors which drive addiction, drawing on his many years' experience, research and campaigning. He is a highly engaging and stimulating speaker and we are sure he will give us all food for thought.

Please visit our website (www.qaad.org) for further information and details of how to book a free place. Alternatively, you can email our Director: alison@qaad.org who will be pleased to send you this information. We look forward to seeing you in January!

We are planning to run further online events during 2021, details of which will be given in future issues of QAADRANT and on our website.

Dry Januarys - 'A group of us decided to do it together, and that really helped.'

Readers may remember articles about Alcohol Concern's 'Communities Together project in north Pembrokeshire (see Autumn 2017). Here, Andrew Misell (Cardiff LM and Director for Wales, Alcohol Change UK) reports on the different experiences of Dry January 2020 amongst veterans of the project.*

We like to think that Communities Together was a community alcohol project with a difference, in that it created opportunities for local people to devise and implement their own

ideas for promoting healthier drinking habits, rather than being led by external 'experts'. Veterans of the project seemed like an ideal group to ask about Dry January. Fortunately, quite a few of them were willing to take a month off alcohol - and to tell us about it!

There are probably as many different Dry Januarys as there are people doing Dry January. Some find it easy, some do it every year; for others, once is enough. So, we decided to try and find out a bit more about



what this annual campaign means from people we knew would tell it to us straight.

First of all, we asked about motivation – the reasons for having a Dry January. Most said they wanted to improve their health, whilst some also wanted to reassure themselves that they could stop drinking if they wanted to. The benefits they described from a month off the booze included weight loss, better sleep, and improved mental health and personal relations. One or two were very open about how they'd previously come to rely on alcohol: *"I'm enjoying not drinking, as [I] realise how much I did this to drown feelings which I needed to face...I'm calmer and less erratic."*

There was an interesting mix of people who were either quite determinedly going without a drop for 31 days, and others who thought that it might not be much fun. One person said they were having a *"dampish sort of January"* and another asked, *"Can I consider Dry February, as there's less days in February?"* One thing that seemed to make a difference to how well anyone's Dry January went was how much support they got from those around them: *"A group of us living in Fishguard decided to do it together, and that really helped."* On the other hand, someone else said: *"I found it quite difficult doing Dry January. Living in Fishguard, there is quite a culture of going to the pub of an evening."* So, in order to make things a bit easier, and to demonstrate that you

can still go to the pub during Dry January, we organised a beer festival!

One of the highlights of the project was the 2017 Fishguard and Goodwick Alcohol-Free Beer Festival at the local rugby club – an event so novel, it was reported in the 'weird news' section of the Daily Mirror. Weird or not, it was a big success and clearly overdue for a revival. So, we stocked up the rugby club bar again with beers, wines, ciders, and premixed cocktails, all at around 0.5% ABV (alcohol by volume), and put the word out. Around 60-70 people came along and, of course, we quizzed them on their reasons for attending. The main one was curiosity. There was also a lot of scepticism. It's a testament to how much low-ABV drinks have improved in the last few years that even the biggest sceptics pronounced themselves pleasantly surprised: *"Finding tasty alcohol-free beers at the Fishguard Festival made all the difference. Now I can drink with friends and those of us who aren't on alcohol don't feel out of it."*

Seeing as we can't host a Beer Festival in Fishguard every week (much as we'd love to) there were a few calls for more pubs in the area to stock a better range of alcohol-free beers and ciders, particularly since many people in this largely rural area usually travel by car on a night out. Publicans, take note!

So, what did we learn? We learned that even if there are all sorts of ways to have a Dry January, all of us can benefit from a bit of moral support in our efforts to manage our drinking. We hope that other towns and villages will be encouraged by our experiences in Fishguard and Goodwick to try out their own local Dry January campaigns.

**Alcohol Change UK was formed from the merger of Alcohol Concern and Alcohol Research UK in April 2017.*



The Aftermath

In this article, a Friend describes the aftermath of someone's fatal drug overdose on her own son's life. To protect anonymity, all names have been changed.

The doorbell went. It was Patrick. He is never good news. It was he who, 19 years ago, introduced our son, David, to heroin. However, this time I was grateful to him. He told us David's neighbour had phoned him to report there had been an ambulance present in the middle of the night and that the door was now sealed shut with no sign of David. The neighbour had no contact details for us so asked Patrick to let us know.

Where does one begin? I rang casualty, who were helpful and patient but reported no record of anyone of that name attending. Then I rang 101. Again I was met with helpfulness and a promise to ring back when there was anything to report. Not long after I was told that David was OK and in a police safe house. Though I spoke briefly with a police officer, I didn't think to ask for the address and when I phoned back, it was not supplied. It went unsaid that David is in his 40s and might not want contact with his parents. The officer did not tell me that they had removed his mobile, so we waited. I phoned his pharmacist, concerned he might not be able to collect his methadone. She'd seen him, uncharacteristically early, but couldn't tell me that and or that I'd no need to worry!

At 4pm, our phone went and David was able to tell us the story. The previous night, a friend of a friend had turned up under the influence of heroin. Wisely - or not - he had let him in or the chap would probably have slept in the corridor. This was in the first couple of weeks of lockdown so there was no way he should have been allowed in. He proceeded to take more heroin, ignoring worried suggestions from David to perhaps take half the quantity and more later if he needed it.

David told us that he had undergone training on how to inject Naltrexone when fellow addicts have overdosed. On two previous occasions this had worked successfully, but this time it did not. He called an ambulance; the police arrived too. The man could not be revived.

At 7am, having had no sleep, David was moved to the safe house three miles away. Sensibly, he visited his pharmacy to collect his methadone before sleeping all day. He was supplied with a food parcel and later, mysteriously, found a phone left in the lobby of the block of flats where he was now living. Interestingly, six months on, his own mobile phone has still not been returned.

I wonder how other people cope without family or friends, and probably without the best part of a fortnight's Universal Credit in their pocket. When David phoned, he asked us for some form of timepiece as he had no way of telling the time without his phone. We also took an elderly television and computer and a radio. I was amused that he also asked us for a mirror.

After eight days, he was allowed back to his flat. Having coped very well with the trauma up until then, he found the return immensely depressing. Every single item had been removed from cupboards, shelves, and drawers and thoroughly searched, and nothing put back in place. The only thing that was removed was a model gun, which was restored to him. It was unusual for him to be treated well by the police. They appeared to understand the stresses he'd been through that night and praised him for coping well.

Reflecting on this story, I think it shows how widely the impact of a drug fatality spreads - directly and indirectly, emotionally and practically. It is impossible to say how many more people - the dead man's family, his friends and local users who knew him - were also affected. It will be an experience few will be able to forget.



Walking through my local park, I noticed a plastic wallet attached to a wooden post by the pond. It contained a couple of poems. On return visits, I have found that the poems change each week, and I have come to look forward to encountering new thoughts (and often unfamiliar poets) half-hidden amongst the trees and grasses. Here are three, which I hope Friends will find of comfort at the close of the year:

Last night as I was sleeping

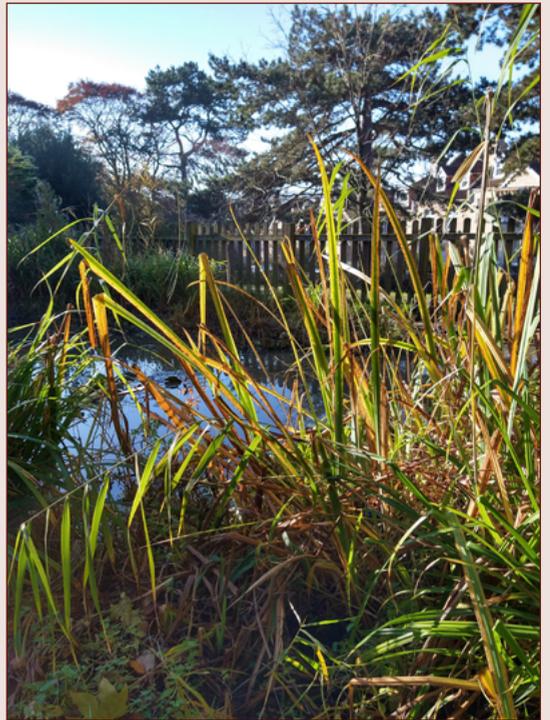
Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that a fiery sun was giving
light inside my heart.
It was fiery because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light
and brought tears to my eyes.

Last night as I slept,
I dreamt—marvellous error!—
that it was God I had
here inside my heart.

Antonio Machado (1875 – 1939)



You, Darkness

You, darkness, that I come from
I love you more than all the fires
that fence in the world,
for the fire makes a circle of light for everyone
and then no one outside learns of you.

But the darkness pulls in everything –
shapes and fires, animals and myself,
how easily it gathers them,
powers and people –

and it is possible a great presence is moving near
me.

I have faith in nights.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 – 1926)



Prescription medication – unexpected harm

In this article, a Friend recounts his experience of becoming dependent on medication prescribed by his GP, and the serious side effects which he suffered as a result.

I was involved with QAAD during the 1980s, eventually departing to go to university. For years I had proudly told everyone that I did not smoke, drink or take drugs. Imagine my horror when I discovered that I had been addicted to a particular medication!

A doctor had put me on Loprazolam [a benzodiazepine] and I had unwittingly become dependent upon it, being a good patient and swallowing the tablets like sweets. Medication affects people in different ways but in my case it proved frighteningly life-changing. The drug was supposed to relieve my anxieties about work and studies. Instead, it caused me drowsiness during the day and insomnia at night. It also produced slight amnesia and occasionally made me feel drunk, even slurring my speech. Nobody had ever explained the side-effects to me and so I thought that these symptoms were my own fault and responsibility. All this was bad enough, but then I got sacked from one job for falling asleep in front of a computer and then disliked in another for failing to carry out the work expected of me.

Relief came when I moved home and got a different doctor. She refused to prescribe any more and sent me to a counsellor at a local hospital. This good lady got me to take only half a tablet, and then a quarter and so on. She also advised meditation, massage and herbal teas!

Curiously, all this did not affect my ability to obtain two university degrees and various other

qualifications. Nevertheless, I inclined towards temporary and part-time work so that I could rest in the late afternoon. I also felt much anger about my past and how things might have been so different had I remained medication-free. I am now retired and leading a more philosophical life-style!

QAAD has heard from Friends concerned about GPs' changing approach to repeat prescriptions, specifically for pain relief. We understand that there is growing understanding of the harm long-term prescribing may incur. As a result, some GPs are now considering referrals to Pain Clinics, encouraging patients to join gyms or take up exercise regimes, and recommending complementary approaches such as chiropractic, osteopathy, acupuncture and homeopathy. We would be very interested to hear from Friends with chronic pain conditions who have received alternative treatments to prescribed medication and what this experience has been.

Would you be interested in becoming a QAAD Trustee?

Over the coming year, QAAD is keen to appoint some new trustees to support our work. If you share our concerns and would like to be considered, we would be very pleased to hear from you. Experience of financial management and investment would be of particular interest.

To discuss what would be involved, and to arrange an informal meeting, please contact Tim James by email: trjames@doctors.org.uk



Talking things through

We understand that this may have been a stressful and very difficult time for some of our readers. Although we do not offer a counselling service, please call or email our Director if it would help to talk things through with someone who understands and can provide details of specialist sources of support. All contact is held in strict confidence.

Judy Clinton tributes

Friends may have seen a letter in the Friend from Patrick Callaghan and Swithin Fry (September 25th), asking for contributions to a tribute book they are compiling in Judy Clinton's memory. A member of Gloucester AM, Judy was a writer who helped hundreds of people, especially Quakers, through her Writing the Spirit workshops. Some of you may remember the workshop she ran at our 2010 Woodbrooke conference. If you would like to contribute to the book, please email: swithinfry@gmail.com

Thank You

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have received over the past year from individuals, Meetings and Trusts. In order to continue our work, we will need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited. Donations are significant in two ways – they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. Please send your donation to: Ron Barden, Treasurer, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 6JQ. Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate using a BACS transfer, our banks details are: Account Name: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs, A/C No: 31452673 Sort code: 400327.

We would like to hear from you

If you would like to respond to something you have read in this issue, or would like to contribute an article of your own - or a letter – about a personal experience, something you have read which has given you food for thought, or perhaps a local initiative tackling addiction which has caught your attention, QAAD would be pleased to hear from you. We only use writers' names with their permission. Please contact Alison Mather: PO Box 3344, Bristol BS6 9NT tel: 0117 924 6981 or email: alison@qaad.org

Have you looked at the QAAD website recently?

Please visit www.qaad.org for information about QAAD, news of events for Friends, and details of our public issues work.