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## **RCN response Health risks from alcohol: new guidelines**

The consultation provides an opportunity to respond to the proposed new guidelines to limit the health risks associated with the consumption of alcohol.

With a membership of around 430,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in both the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

RCN members are employed in a wide array of roles and as such are in an ideal position to support people with lifestyle support and advice on alcohol consumption, as well as providing specialist advice on alcohol and detox.

General Comments on the guidelines:

While the guidelines are clearly written, there is an assumption that the studies that have shown there to be a protective element of alcohol were all misguided, which means that the report feels biased, rather than being open on the harms and potential benefits of alcohol. It would benefit from more detailed references for individuals to be able to check the facts. There is also an assertion that most of the British public drink on two or less days each week. As this is based on self-report, which is notoriously unreliable and underreported in

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terms of levels of drinking, we are concerned that it is probably not an accurate reflection of the drinking patterns of the British population.

Individuals who drink above the recommended levels are unlikely to read this or see that it refers to them. Invariably people know how many they are drinking. Although there is some reference to this in the document, we feel far more needs to be done to advise and support people to understand this. The drink industry, especially in pubs, bars and restaurants, needs to do more to make the public aware of how many units are in each drink.

This is a subject that needs to get the attention of the public and health professionals alike. Adding in more about risks of developing particular illness would help get the public health message across.

In response to the specific consultation questions:

***Q1. Is the weekly guideline for regular drinking as a whole, along with the explanation in the 'Summary of the proposed guidelines', clear and understandable?***

We feel it is good that the guidelines reinforce the message that there are no completely safe levels of alcohol consumption. There should be more detail on the long term risks and the specific related illnesses.

There is the potential for adding in more about risks of developing cancers, particularly of the throats and tongue, which would make it resonate more with people. The association

Q3.

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**Q7. For the advice on single occasions of drinking, the expert group considered, but did not finally recommend, suggesting a specific number of units that you shouldn't drink more than on any occasion or day, for example, 7 units. They did**

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