

**Embargoed to Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2006**

**ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF GASTROENTEROLOGY**

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The following paper is being presented at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG) on Wednesday.

If you would like further information or comments from the BSG in relation to the Chancellor's Budget announcement on Wednesday, please call 07050 189 821.

### **CHEAP AND AVAILABLE ALCOHOL FUELS A HEALTH CRISIS 'REMINISCENT OF HOGARTH'**

The availability of alcohol in all-day pubs and bars, and in retail outlets ranging from the biggest supermarket to the smallest corner shop is at risk of fuelling a health crisis that current Government alcohol policy may fail to control, the British Society of Gastroenterology heard at its annual meeting.

Liver specialist Professor Ian Gilmore of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital said: "Deaths from cirrhosis have recently overtaken those in continental Europe for the first time. The number of deaths from cirrhosis in young people has risen ten-fold since the 1970s." Cirrhosis is a permanent form of damage to the liver which results in a hard 'scarring' of tissue. Alcohol is the main cause of liver cirrhosis.

"The move in the UK is towards making drink easier to get, when all the international evidence says that the rates of alcohol related health damage is related to increased availability and low price." The Government's alcohol harm reduction strategy has been stronger on the crime and disorder associated with drinking, with the health effects at risk of taking second place.

The low price of alcohol in real terms and its widespread availability is a real concern for our future health, Professor Gilmore said. "In modern times alcohol has never been cheaper or more available. We are in a time of cheap alcohol reminiscent of Hogarth's Gin Lane." He questioned the easy availability of alcohol in supermarkets. "In many civilized countries alcohol is available either from separate shops, or at least from separate sections within supermarkets. Here it is next to the bread and milk."

"This easy availability encourages drinking at home, and this is what is driving the damage to health, just as much as binge-drinking in pubs and bars."

“Government alcohol policy focuses on crime and disorder and binge drinkers and is in danger of overlooking those drinking regularly and excessively at home.”

The widespread promotion of alcohol is part of the problem, according to Professor Gilmore. He called for a ban on TV and radio advertising for drink. ‘Broadcast advertising of alcohol is banned in France, but here there is not even a 9pm watershed to restrict children’s exposure to alcohol advertising.’

He welcomed tighter policing of laws restricting sale of drink to the under 18s and attempts by the alcohol industry to rein in irresponsible promotion of alcohol. “However there are still too many ‘two-for-one’ and ‘buy a pint, get a shot’ offers, and ‘Happy Hours’ that treat alcohol as just another product to sell, rather than a drug that poses potentially massive health risks, particularly to the liver, in the next decade”, Professor Gilmore said.

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Date 22.3.06