Beer: A Social Facilitator for PMI Patients?

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Older, infirm psychiatric patients require medically sound, purposeful, and rewarding activities. There has been a trend toward instituting certain satisfying life experiences for these patients (Cutler, 1972; Finkel, 1971; Mueller & Atlas, 1972).

The present study was stimulated by reports of the effects of beer and wine on the behavior of geriatric patients (Chien, 1971; Kastenbaum, 1965; Kastenbaum & Slater, 1964; Volpe & Kastenbaum, 1967). These investigators concluded that "beer therapy" has considerable utility as a therapeutic agent in a "pub" setting, increasing sociability and decreasing incontinence and the need for medication.

The purpose of the present study was to test experimentally the effects of drinking beer and soft drinks on the social responsivity and beer consumption behavior of two groups of psychiatric medically infirm inpatients at the Brockton VA Hospital.

One hundred twenty-six patients on the PMI (Psychiatric Medically Infirm) wards were reviewed by their physicians for study. Excluded were alcoholics and those who might be in danger of aspirating. Patients were selected who could safely use the experience. Of the 37 male patients cleared to participate, 6 remained away from all treatment sessions, and 1 died. The final pool of subjects (N = 30) ranged in age from 36 to 85 years. Mean age was 59.6 years with S.D. of 13.00. Fourteen of the patients (less than 50% of the total N) were over 60 years of age, and 15 were wheelchair-bound. The most prevalent diagnostic category was Chronic Brain Syndrome; many had multiple diagnoses. A recreation lounge was used for the treatment sessions. The atmosphere was pleasant and pub-like. Tables for four were arranged as in a pub, beer was served in 12-oz. mugs. The alcohol dose was approximately equivalent to that used by Chien (1971).

Beer-Consumption and Social-Responsiveness Scales were developed and used by 6 raters, in 3 teams of 2 raters for each trial session. Inter-rater reliabilities ranged from $r = .66 - .88$ (product-moment correlation) with the majority falling at or above $r = .80$.

The experiment was conducted in 2 phases with 6 sessions in Phase I and 7 in Phase II. The 30 patients were randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The 2 groups were given beer or a soft drink in alternate sessions. A music therapist played old favorite songs on the piano during Phase I, while an attractive volunteer hostess brought beer in mugs to the men. Social responsiveness ratings were made twice during each hour-long session.

A session in Phase I for which there were reliable and complete ratings was chosen to make a statistical evaluation of the social responsiveness hypothesis, using a $2 \times 2$ analysis of variance. The amounts of beverage consumed were assessed at the end of the session and evaluated statistically in an after-only experimental-and-control group design.
The analyses of the beer consumption scale data were not significant. The results of the analysis of the social responsiveness data provided no support for the hypothesis. The men given beer during the session did not become more sociable than the men given soda. A significant trials effect indicated that all patients, independent of beverage, became more sociable during the session. This effect was also found in a Phase II replication, in which therapist activity was reduced.

The results of this study do not support the indiscriminate use of beer as a socialization agent with psychiatric medically infirm patients. On the other hand, many of the patients enjoyed drinking beer, suggesting it should be available by individual prescription.

References

My Days Among the Dead are Passed

My days among the dead are passed;
Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old;
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

With them I take delight in weal,
And seek relief in woe;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedewed
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.

My thoughts are with the dead, with them
I live in long-past years,
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
Partake their hopes and fears,
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with an humble mind.

My hopes are with the dead, anon
My place with them will be,
And I with them shall travel on
Through all futurity;
Yet leaving here a name, I trust,
That will not perish in the dust.

Robert Southey