REGRANTING OF DRIVING LICENCES AND DRINKING HABITS:
INTRODUCTION

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Drunken driving represents one of the many ways alcohol consumption might threaten human health. One particular group of special interest in this respect is represented by the heavy drinker, who is likely to be or to become a repeat offender. This problem was in focus when Pharmacia and Upjohn arranged a Symposium related to this topic with the title: 'Regranting of Driving Licences: The Usefulness of Carbohydrate Deficient Transferrin (CDTect®) as an Indicator of Alcohol Consumption', in Brussels, Belgium, on May 10th, 1996. The title of the Symposium reflects what has become increasingly evident, namely that a large and probably growing proportion of drunken drivers are heavy drinkers. Not all are driving drunkards, but many might well be. In order to know more about the situation, the introduction of the use of biological markers of alcohol intake is an interesting approach. Various presentations at the Symposium demonstrated different aspects on how more objective knowledge about a driver's drinking habits might be valuable as seen from the material in following pages.

The Symposium concentrated on heavy drinking in relation to licence regranting. This appears to be an important link, since the loss of the driving licence connected to a drunken driving episode in many countries represents a harder punishment to the driver than the sentence itself. The driver might be willing to do much to regain the licence; in many cases he would be willing to change his lifestyle of heavy drinking.

The regranting of a licence could thus be an important motivating factor to give up heavy drinking. Thus an important link between legal and administrative reactions on the one hand and health promoting behaviour on the other could be created. Results from several countries are promising and appear to support such integrated actions.

Some scepticism should, however, be retained. Many drunken drivers, after punishment and losing their licence, will continue to drive without a driver's licence. These people will see little motivation in struggling for a regranting as long as their licence-free driving can go undetected. It is probably first when the road surveillance of drivers reaches higher intensity or when the possession of a licence is a necessity to drive a vehicle (e.g. the licence operating as an electronic key), that the regranting process will show its full power as a motivator for reduced drinking.