

Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into the general principles of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

The Royal College of Nursing Wales is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into the general principles of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill. We would like to raise a number of issues in relation to the terms of reference:

- I. The Royal College of Nursing has for some time been calling for the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) for alcohol and on that basis the Royal College of Nursing Wales unequivocally supports the introduction of this piece of legislation.
- II. Nurses in Wales are faced and challenged with the consequences of alcohol misuse every day. These range from dealing with violent and aggressive patients in accident and emergency departments (A&E) to caring for people suffering from long term poor health as a result of sustained alcohol abuse. Nurses throughout Wales have a role and commitment to assist the people of Wales by supporting the population to make healthier choices.
- III. The RCN's prevention work is underpinned by the principle that we should empower individuals with the appropriate information they will need to understand the impact of alcohol misuse in order for them to make healthier lifestyle choices. The RCN, however, also believes that more can be done to change the wider environment so that the healthier choice is the easy choice. Sometimes, this may require regulation by government, and on the subject of alcohol misuse the RCN's stated position is that this is one area that requires urgent government intervention.
- IV. Excessive alcohol consumption is a major source of morbidity and premature death in Wales, and RCN Wales acknowledge the research undertaken by the University of Sheffield in identifying the benefits to be accrued by the health services in Wales by the introduction of MUP¹.
- V. It is RCN Wales' view that the evidence presented in the Explanatory Memorandum is compelling and, as already stated, it is the RCN's position that the introduction of MUP will have an impact on alcohol consumption as it drives down the level of purchasing. It is, however, our contention that MUP does not go far enough. As such, the RCN urge government to also:
 - Legislate to prevent the alcohol industry from undertaking promotional activities which encourage excessive consumption or target children.

¹ Sheffield Alcohol Policy Model (SAPM) (Brennan et al, 2008).

- Legislate for the mandatory labelling of all alcohol drinks with unit and health information in a consistent format.
- Introduce a drink drive limit of 50mg per 100 millilitres of blood alcohol content.

Alcohol Health Alliance

VI. The Committee may want to be aware of the following statement made by the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, of which the Royal College of Nursing was a signatory:

“We unequivocally endorse the Welsh government’s adoption of a minimum unit price for alcohol. Minimum unit pricing is a highly effective tool to reduce the number of deaths related to alcohol, crime and workplace absence. The Welsh government continues to demonstrate its firm commitment to tackle the problem of cheap alcohol and the devastating effect this has on our communities, especially its most vulnerable members.

“This decisive action will not impact prices in pubs or bars but target pocket-money-priced alcohol. It is simply unacceptable that three litres of white cider, containing the equivalent alcohol of 22 shots of vodka, can be bought for just £3.49.

“With alcohol misuse costing £21bn-£52bn per year, the UK government must now follow Wales and Scotland by implementing a policy that will save lives, relieve pressure on our NHS and fulfil its commitment to even out life chances.”

About the Royal College of Nursing

The RCN is the world’s largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.