

CIENCIA, VINO Y SALUD

VINSALUD Chile 2002, Wine and Health International Congress, took place in October 2002, in Santiago de Chile. As a scientific meeting, its purpose was to discuss and communicate the state of the art and the supporting scientific evidences, linking positive health effects with moderate wine consumption, as well as the biological consequences of abusive consumption.

For centuries and more, wine has been present in our society and is associated with food, pleasure, health, sickness and violence. Until very recently, the analysis of the consequences of wine drinking dealt mostly with abuse, and specifically with ethanol. The coincidence of the recent awareness of the role of free radicals in biology and pathology, plus the evidences linking cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases with oxidative damage, provided the framework to look hopefully to wine phenolics, often referred to as flavonoids, as valuable nutrients due to their excellent antioxidant capacity.

The need to establish scientifically the biological significance of ethanol and flavonoids, as well as the comparative effects of other alcoholic beverages, and flavonoid containing foods, together with the epidemiological, medical, physiological and biochemical studies performed in this area, motivated this congress. The participation of a wide range of specialists, experts in fields as diverse as chemistry, physical-chemistry, medicine, epidemiology, psychology, sociology and economy, contributed to its success. New epidemiological findings stressed the benefits of moderate drinking, helped to define the upper limits of consumption when health benefits disappear, proposed again that wine is the healthiest among alcoholic beverages and suggested that women are more responsive to the positive wine-associated health effects. The epidemiological data in relationship with cancer is positive, with decreased incidence in many type of cancers when the alcoholic beverage is wine. However, the issue of breast cancer, which in some studies has been shown weakly

related to alcohol consumption has not been settled. More and more, flavonoids appear as fascinating natural compounds which, in addition to their antioxidant properties, exhibit other interesting biological activities which might also contribute to their beneficial effects. Among the effects of flavonoids that originated more communications and discussion were their effects on hemostasis and on vascular reactivity and endothelial function.

Wine, health and healthy diet also belong to the Mediterranean diets and the studies on their active components and mechanisms of health-promoting effects overlap extensively. The arguments in favor of considering the Chilean diet as one of the so called Mediterranean diets were presented and discussed.

Finally, cultural and educational aspects related to wine consumption and particularly aspects concerned with addiction and alcoholism were discussed. Emphasis was given to the necessary role of education, a process which today is increasingly based in the communication of evidences rather than in the formulation of strict recommendations. Moderation and abuse are behavioral aspects pertinent to food consumption and nutrient intake in a wide perspective. Focusing on alcohol abuse might be very misleading when considering pleasant and healthy nutrition and its necessary educational promotion. There are many specific foods, some specific nutrients and calories as a whole, for which lack of moderation is more harmful than for alcohol. Unfortunately, the limits of moderation and abuse for our diet and nutrient intake although increasingly better defined, are still fuzzy.

Also, during VINSALUD Chile 2002 the need was established for a follow up wine and health meeting, which could take place in South Africa in the next two to three years. The subject is a focus of attraction for both scientists and the public at large. In fact, wine is placed at a crossroads where pleasure, nutrition, chronic diseases, quality of life, temperance, economical development, religion and the history of man on the various continents concur.