

NTDB® data points

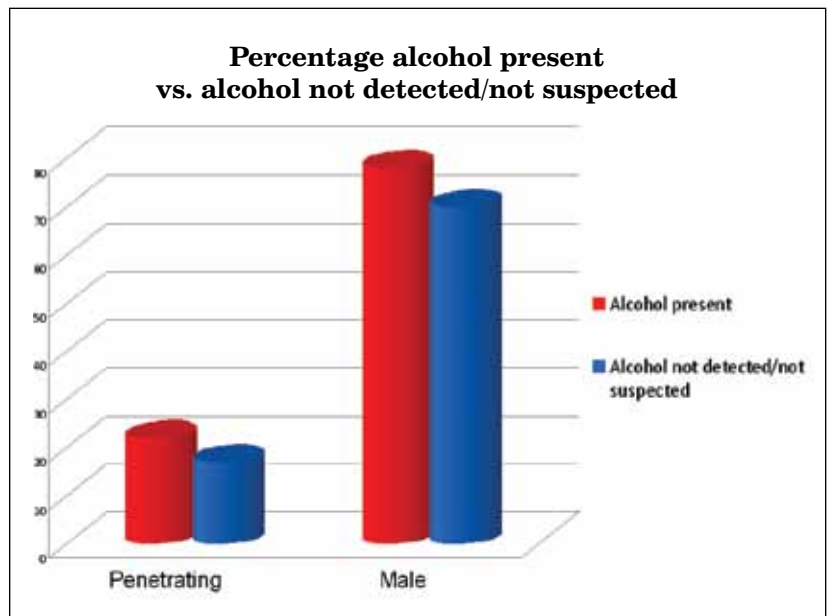
The University of Alcohol

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS

Last month was National Trauma Month, with a focus on alcohol awareness and the dangers of underage drinking. In last month's *Bulletin*, this public health issue was examined by looking at the NTDB records for the age group of 12-thru 20-year-olds. This month's analysis focuses in on a subset of underage drinking that includes college-age individuals. Several times each year one is reminded of this unfortunate problem by another news story of a college youth who has died from acute alcohol intoxication.

There has been an outcry by chancellors and presidents of colleges and universities across the country that the current legal drinking age is not working. In spite of education and efforts aimed toward addressing underage college drinking, there persists a "culture of dangerous, clandestine binge-drinking" that has resulted in deaths on college campuses. This reform movement has been termed the Amethyst (derived from the Greek term for "not intoxicated") Initiative, and supports informed and unimpeded debate on the 21-year-old drinking age (<http://www.amethystinitiative.org/>). Proponents believe that lowering the drinking age would result in a more responsible use of alcohol.

College bingeing began increasing in the late 1990s, long



after the legal drinking age was raised to 21 by the 1984 National Minimum Drinking Age Act (up for reauthorization this year). College bingeing varies by state and even by colleges located within the same cities. Currently, all major public health authorities—including the American Medical Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Board—support the current drinking age (<http://www.slate.com/id/2198522#Q>).

In order to examine the occurrence of college underage alcohol-related trauma in the

National Trauma Data Bank Research dataset, 2007 admissions (formerly called research dataset 8.0) records were searched for admission dates between August 15 through May 15 (representing the academic calendar year), age 18 through 20, and by the field "alcohol present in blood." Among the results, 24,229 records contained an age between 18 and 20 during this date range; 12,556 had a usable response of alcohol present or not detected/not suspected and 3,305 records indicated the patients were positive for alcohol. Of the alcohol-present group, 2,986 records had discharge sta-

tus recorded, including 2,558 discharged to home, and 305 to acute care/rehabilitation; 23 were sent to nursing homes, and 100 died. These patients were 77.9 percent male and on average 19.1 years of age; they had an average length of stay of 5.3 days, an average injury severity score of 10.5, and 21.8 percent penetrating trauma. Among 2,241 of the alcohol present patients who were also tested for drugs, 949, or over 40 percent, tested positive. When compared with the alcohol not detected/not suspected group, an increase in male gender and penetrating injury type were found to be statistically significant (these data are displayed in the graph on page 59).

Alcohol on many college campuses is as ubiquitous as water. In preparing this article, the author consulted with two family members—one of drinking age, one not—who are students at colleges that vary in geographic location, urbanism, campus size, percentage of Greek participation, surrounding community demographics, and are located in two different Midwestern states.

These colleges required completion of a Web-based alcohol education module prior to starting college and offer ongoing programs on alcohol use that educate through demonstrations, role-playing, as well as mentor groups. Programs such as these are available on most campuses throughout the country; however, they have not stemmed the tide of underage drinking and bingeing. There remains a variable pattern of consumption across the country. Raising the tax on beer (the most commonly consumed alcoholic beverage on campus) in a manner similar to the cigarette excise tax has reduced consumption (<http://www.iconocast.com/00033/L6/News3.htm>).

Underage drinking on college campuses is a complex problem with no simple answer. As with many prevention strategies aimed at youths and adolescents, parental involvement is a key component. What education is done in the home can be powerful, long lasting, and can translate to the college environment. Parental guidance will better prepare students for a college education instead of a

University of Alcohol experience.

The full NTDB *Annual Report Version 8.0* is available on the ACS Web site as a PDF and a PowerPoint presentation at <http://www.ntdb.org>.

If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.

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