

# The dangers of chronic drinking

## There's nothing fun or glamorous about abusing alcohol

On behalf of the Brevard Healthcare Forum, we support the sentiments expressed in a recent FLORIDA TODAY letter to the editor, titled "Stop running TgIF photos of young people at bars."

Chronic drinking poses a serious threat to Brevard County with more than 9 percent of adults reporting consumption of more than 60 drinks during the past month based on a recent community health assessment. This is significantly higher than the 4.2 percent reported by U.S. adults overall.

This study also revealed that 13.4 percent in Brevard are considered binge drinkers, defined as those who have had five or more alcoholic drinks on any one occasion at least once in the past month. An equally sobering statistic is that 13.3 percent of adults aged 18 to 39 acknowledged drinking and driving in the past month.

With respect to health, the trademark hangover symptoms — headache, upset stomach and



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fatigue — may be the least of drinkers' concerns.

According to 2008 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, alcohol is the third leading lifestyle-related cause of death in the nation. Research indicates that drinking more than one drink per day for women and two for men is associated with increased risks of chronic health conditions, including high blood pressure, stroke and many types of cancers.

As the amount of alcohol consumed increases, the risk of these conditions also increases.

The Brevard Healthcare Forum has taken action to help reduce chronic and binge drinking in Brevard County by directly training local health-care provid-

ers in effective screening techniques and brief interventions, as well as informing them of a free online continuing education module offered by the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

Future plans are to work with local emergency room nurses and to disseminate a media campaign to educate consumers about the negative health effects of excessive alcohol use.

Sponsored by Florida Tech's College of Psychology and Liberal Arts, the Brevard Healthcare Forum is a countywide coalition of health care providers who are committed to improving the health of Brevard County through collaboration and partnerships.

Based upon survey data, the forum identified three pressing health-care issues facing residents, including childhood obesity, access to primary health-care services and behavioral health care — which encompasses chronic and binge drinking.

FLORIDA TODAY's features

in TgIF and the online "Zap Squad," depicting young adults engaging in risky behaviors, do not send the correct message to its readers, particularly adolescents. This imagery conveys that your organization accepts and encourages excessive drinking rather than responsible and healthy lifestyle choices.

With the support of local media, we need to commit to creating awareness that chronic and binge drinking is a real and present danger in Brevard County. Such behavior can have devastating effects on the lives of the drinkers themselves, as well as their families, friends, and communities.

We urge FLORIDA TODAY to partner with us in our efforts to reduce chronic and binge drinking by making more responsible choices about how you choose to showcase local entertainment establishments and the people who patronize them. ■

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