

September 2012

Many of us like an alcoholic drink now and then and do so responsibly, most of the time. However as vice-chairman of the cross-party alcohol misuse group it is worrying to see an increasing trend in some of the national and local statistics.

Don't get me wrong, I am not anti-alcohol. I spoke in a debate before our summer break about women and alcohol misuse and I would probably fall into a category of women that worry our health professionals because we have a glass or two of wine most nights with dinner. I live opposite a pub and often pop in after work or at the weekends – I actually like chatting to the punters who keep my feet on the ground and head out of the Westminster bubble with their honest and frank views on everyday issues. But I'm lucky that it has a good landlord who understands his responsibilities not only to the local community but also to the welfare of his customers.

Sadly the statistics are showing an increase in the number of people misusing or abusing alcohol and it is happening across all age groups and sectors of society. It is in part as a consequence of the liberalisation of the licensing laws but it is also down to cheap alcohol so easy available. Talk to a recovering alcoholic, as I have on many occasions, and ask how hard it is to quit booze when it is so in their face. Try popping into a supermarket and see how many aisles you pass before you see wine on offer.

The consequence is shocking. Across Kent & Medway there are 130 children aged 12-17 receiving treatment for alcohol dependency. This saddens me enormously. But then look at the stats for alcohol-related admissions to hospital across the South East. A shocking 53,816 people aged over 60 were admitted, wholly or partially attributable to alcohol.

The financial cost on the NHS because of alcohol is incredible but ultimately it is sad that our younger and older populations are misusing alcohol more each year. To encourage responsible drinking must be a Government priority if we are to reverse this damaging trend and reduce the cost and consequence for society.