

Alcohol Abuse

A Health Problem

By Phil M. Tutiaoff

One of Charles Bronson's lines in a movie was "There are ways...and there are ways." A highly paid movie star and health in the Aleut Region may be a bit too extreme except for the fact that everybody on top of the ground is concerned with either his health or someone else's. As to his somewhat cryptic line, let's apply it to improving health delivery services and the various ways that is accomplished.

Our brothers of the sea who live in the Arctic at Pt. Barrow met for two days discussing one facet of health in our state that is a major topic for all Alaskan Natives. I am proud of their efforts. Their methodology in dealing with it should be their own. It was a shameful and highly distasteful manner that began what culminated in that two-day meeting.

I submit that a more honorable way could have been devised. Public admission that one of our large Native communities has a dreadful health problem will not solve it, and could be detrimental in some respects. The media got a good feeling and probably profited, but what about the Inupiaq at Pt. Barrow or one of our own towns?

The Aleutian/Pribilof Island Association's health department, which includes social services, has laid the groundwork with an outline for those things that are beneficial to our health. I know the North Slope people had something comparable.

I have joked with caucasian friends many times that we sure need something to help us identify them better because, to us, they all look alike! No let's be realistic and turn that around. Regardless of which part of our great state newcomers enter, if they have done any preparatory research they will come upon a fairly well-known fact, which is, the major health problem among the Natives is Alcohol Abuse. So...whenever they see

a native a lot of them will think of that. It is a natural reaction on their part.

Many of us working on our own problem with booze will pause and check our track record now and then and think about the whole thing. For one would not wish my experience with alcohol on anyone. I will help to save others the agony, especially the young people in whose hands lie the future.

To combat a problem as big as substance abuses, there needs to be a terrific amount of cooperation on the part of those who are part of the problem as well as those who aren't.

Much of the alcohol abuse is a symptom of a malfunction within the person. Its insidious nature is its worst factor. It aggravates what's been eating on a person whether that thing is mental or physical.

Ideally, complete separation from alcohol for all time after you've read this is the best way to go. Realistically, because of the addictive qualities contained in this substance, concrete steps must be taken.

Because we know ourselves better than anyone else, that is the very best place to start. If you're concerned about how much you drink, ask those near and dear to you how they feel about it. The best thing about this process is that the pride we possess in ourselves will not be trampled on. Moral support is priceless.

Then the circle grows. Your family, acquaintances, fellow workers, health aides, C.H.R.'s and clergymen are in your communities and they can help at the local level. Health Aides, C.H.R.'s, itinerant doctors and nurses can make connections for resources that lie outside your hometown. You can help them by listing those things that are most important to you now. Think about how things have been and what part you'd like to improve. Get to know as much about alcohol as you can. It has as much right to be on top of the ground as you and I; and besides, it's been here a hell of a lot longer than we've been and will still be here when we're pushing up putchkis!

We all have to do something to change things around and taking small steps first is a pretty good way, but like the man said, "There are ways...and there are ways." Good luck.