

AVCP holds alcohol conference

(Editor's Note: The following commentary is summarized from an address by AVCP President Gene Peltola to the First Regional Conference on Alcohol, Violence and Crime, presented at Bethel on January 30.)

AVCP welcomes efforts to deal with our greatest community health problem. The AVCP Convention meeting at St. Mary's last October, gave support to the efforts of the Task Force on Alcohol, Violence and Crime recently established in Bethel. We encourage the conference to continue your deliberations, and look forward to your recommendations and suggestions as to how AVCP may assist you with your objectives.

Concerned with the growing number of problems associated with the disease of alcoholism throughout the region is reflected in practically all of our community meetings. It is reflected in instances of family violence, increasing crime, increasing need for family assistance, and the general dissolution of family and cultural life. Bethel has established a Task Force to examine the efforts that can be made to realistically approach this illness and to restore individual and community health. Our treatment center has a waiting list and we have no medically sound detoxification program that will start the victims of this disease on the road to health. In our villages, we lack the capability to provide sensitive aftercare for those who

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have started their recovery.

An answer frequently heard is the so-called sleep-off center. None of us wishes to see friends and relatives freeze to death but, time and time again, it has been proven that the sleep-off center does not help. It reinforces the habit of drunkenness as abusers tell themselves, "Someone will pick me up." Time after time we have seen this well meaning attempt do nothing but promote the continued abuse of alcohol.

One state official has said, "...nothing will be done about alcoholism until the villages own the problem and own the solution." We need to find solutions that work for us and invent our own solutions. This is not going

to happen by magic, but rather by a concerted effort, with leadership, a well-organized and interlocking series of programs that includes identification of the problem drinker, provision of counseling, detoxification, effective treatment, and perhaps, most important, follow up support to assure the alcoholic that he is not isolated from his community. The programs must be networked to insure the consistency of counseling, detox, treatment, aftercare. The final component is the support of school programs to address alcoholism in the home. We needn't be embarrassed to talk about this with kids as they have experienced in-home drunkenness and many have had to apologize to friends for the con-

dition of their family.

It is time for us to do something with the million or so dollars we spend on treatment of alcoholism alone in this community. We need to pool our talents, fiscal and instructional resources and medical resources we have available to us. We are fortunate to have the kinds of resources, the concern of this city, the participation of the villages and the range of social and human resources available to us. It is time we turned these resources into an effective, well organized, well-planned and implemented approach to our major tragedy--alcoholism.

AVCP commends you for your efforts in this conference.