

Drug and Alcohol Abuse: A Clinical Guide to Diagnosis and Treatment. 4th edn. By Marc A. Schuckit. Plenum Medical Book Company, New York and London. 1995, 390pp. £25.00. ISBN 0-306-448645.

The fact that this is in its fourth edition since 1979 indicates its popularity. Although it discusses general issues in the addiction field, the bulk of the book deals in a standard format with all known drugs of abuse including alcohol. The format deals with pharmacology, epidemiology and emerging problems for each drug. Emergency reactions include toxic reactions, drug withdrawal syndromes, organic brain sequelae, psychosis, flashbacks, associated pathology example, anxiety and depression and medical problems are dealt with in much greater detail than usual. The book is written for a physician dealing with all aspects including emergency work in such individuals. One advantage is that the book can be used as a rapid reference source and provides a rapid guidance of how to deal with any particular drug, the range of drugs being extremely wide. It can be a very valuable source of reference, to house physicians or psychiatric residents, on what to do in relation to any drug problem particularly of an acute nature that they are likely to meet.

B. D. HORE

Russia Goes Dry: Alcohol, State and Society. By Stephen White. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, 250 pp. £14.95 hardback; £40.00 paperback. ISBN 0-521 552117.

The reader faced with this title might react with disbelief until spotting the irony. The book describes the abortive attempt to reduce alcohol consumption during the final years of the Soviet Union. The effort collapsed through a combination of bureaucratic ineptitude and popular antagonism. The author is Professor of Politics at the University of Glasgow and President of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies. As preparation, he studied newly opened archives in Moscow and met medical leaders and other professionals who were active in the former Soviet Union.

Fondness of alcohol is a long-standing feature of the Russian people. This was so pronounced that at the outbreak of the First World War a total ban was ordered on drinking. The Tsar set a personal example. Less severe restrictions were effected in the United Kingdom, though the British monarch also renounced alcohol while hostilities lasted. The Kaiser did not need to commence abstinence; for many years he had acted on his conviction that a national leader should not drink. The ban in Russia meant that for the first time its soldiers were sent into battle unfortified by spirits. Probably incorrectly their enforced lack of artificial ardo has been blamed for their defeats and consequent low morale. The troops of other nations continued to be fed spirits before despatch to mutilation or death.

When the Winter Palace in Petrograd was stormed in 1917, the Bolsheviks helped themselves to the wines and spirits that had accumulated during the war. The drunken scenes amongst soldiers and civilians were not enacted by the film director Eisenstein for his well-known recreation of the event. Contemporary attacks by peasants on the country mansions of the nobility were often aimed at looting stores of vodka.

After their success in 1917 the communist authorities continued the prohibition of alcohol. Their theoretical basis

stemmed from the observations of the Manchester slums by Engels in 1845. He felt that the inebriety he witnessed followed from the capitalist degradation of workers, and would cease when the working class was emancipated. Engels was himself a capitalist who was able twice a week to escape from his factory and chase foxes with the Cheshire Hunt. Less hypocritically Lenin became an alcohol abstainer and was backed by Trotsky in decrees to enforce prohibition. When Stalin assumed control he continued the measures until faced with their unpopularity and failures. Restrictions were progressively relaxed and in 1925 were fully lifted.

Despite some government-led efforts to alter public acceptance of alcohol, its consumption rose during subsequent decades. The actual figures were concealed by official secrecy, but Professor White has been able to uncover data which establish the rise. The taxes on alcohol came to equal the whole defence budget (as in tsarist times) and by the early 1970s exceeded it.

Soviet leaders did not set good examples. The alcohol excesses of Stalin frightened his subordinates as they were expected to keep up with his intake. Brezhnev exerted similar alarm in his German counterparts Schmidt and Honecker. His successor Andropov was teetotal, yet the death of Chernenko in 1985 was attributed to cirrhosis. Gorbachev is a moderate taker of alcohol but when he became leader the harmful effects of alcohol misuse were blatant in his country. Drinking was recognized as a major cause of low life expectancy, suicides, traffic accidents, violent crime and marital breakdown. It is likely that Gorbachev was further influenced by his wife Raisa, whose brother incurred alcohol dependence that was accompanied by two unsuccessful marriages.

The campaign against alcohol was orchestrated by two teetotal members of the Politburo. A national programme was devised to change popular perceptions of drunkenness. The Academy of Medicine and the Academy of Sciences were expected to take part, as were trade unions and the media. A temperance society was founded. Annual decreases were specified (not always openly) in the production of vodka and liqueurs. Compulsory detention for lengthy periods in non-medical centres was ordered for drunkards.

The early results were encouraging. During the second year of the campaign in 1986, the death rate fell for the first time in many years. Serious crimes and divorces were fewer. Surveys indicated that 8 of the population renounced alcohol and 30 drank less; 49 approved of the measures while 26 considered them too weak.

The initial impetus was not sustained. The restrictions were considered too harsh, haphazard or bizarre. Attempts to enforce them were inept or provoked corruption. The temperance society was weakened by an inflated bureaucracy and by drunkenness of some of its officials. Correspondents to its journal variously blamed faults on Freemasons, Jews, the CIA and the long-dead Trotsky; disappointingly the Jesuits were overlooked. Long waits in queues, up to three hours, in order to purchase the reduced amounts of official vodka produced particular discontent.

The production of homemade vodka ('samogon') flourished. Illicit distillation spread from its traditional rural base into the cities. The large quantities of sugar that were required led to large-scale thefts of its stocks and raised its price on the world commodity markets. The manufacturers and purveyors of samogon were often middle-aged or elderly females. During