LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Investigation of the Effects of Alcohol on Sleep Using Actigraphy

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We thank Professor Kawada for his interest in our study. We agree that we should have included the sensitivity setting for the actigraph. We did in fact use the high-sensitivity (20 counts per minute) setting, which as the authors pointed out has previously been suggested to be the best to detect wakefulness when compared with polysomnography.

We accept that a larger sample size would have allowed firmer conclusions to be drawn, in particular in relation to subgroup analyses and comparisons. We pointed out this limitation in our discussion. However, many of the historically significant investigations of the effect of alcohol on sleep have had similarly small sample sizes or smaller, for example Stone (1980) is widely cited in the literature on alcohol, but had only six subjects.

The difficulty in assessing confounding factors is, of course, common in observational studies and even more an issue in observational studies with small sample sizes. Indeed the possibly causal relationship between sleep and mood, and the direction of causality, has in particular been difficult to tease out. We acknowledged this in the discussion when we mention ‘trait differences between individuals’ possibly contributing to differences and explaining some of our observations.

REFERENCE