
NTDB™ data points

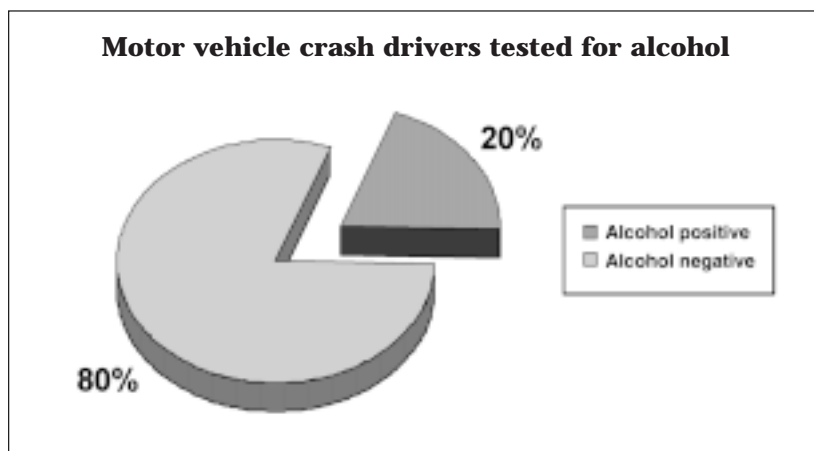
“I’ll drink to that”

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS, Chicago, IL, and John Fildes, MD, FACS, Las Vegas, NV

Summer has finally arrived. Large numbers of people take to the roads and travel countless miles driving at all hours of the day and night. Often they drive without adequate sleep or otherwise impaired. Impairment may be due to the aging process, sleep deprivation, recreational drugs, or alcohol consumption.

Just how big is the problem of alcohol as it relates to motor vehicle trauma? When looking at the records in the third annual report of the National Trauma Data Bank™ (NTDB), there are records representing 121,494 motor vehicle drivers. Of this number, 116,022 drivers were tested, and 23,345 were found to be positive for alcohol. This number shows that one out of every five injured drivers had alcohol on board. These results are depicted in the chart on this page.

Impaired driving is truly something that touches the lives of many people. According to the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA), impaired driving will affect one in three Americans during their lifetimes. Motor vehicle crashes that are alcohol related kill someone every 30 minutes and result in a nonfatal injury every two minutes. In addition to the lives lost and families that are emotionally scarred, there is also a substantial financial burden. It has been esti-



mated in another NHTSA report that alcohol-related crashes in the year 2000 were associated with more than \$51 billion in total costs.

A public health problem of this magnitude requires aggressive prevention measures. There are several programs that have been proven to be effective. One such program is the use of sobriety checkpoints. According to a 2002 report published in *Traffic Injury Prevention* by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sobriety checkpoints consistently reduced alcohol-related crashes by about 20 percent. These checkpoints worked whether they were used only for a short time or were used continuously over a number of years. Other sound prevention initiatives include enforcement

of 0.8% blood alcohol laws, minimum legal age drinking laws, and “zero tolerance” laws for drivers under the age of 21. Those of you with children are well aware that it is never too early to discuss the negative impact of alcohol and drugs in their lives. So as summer gets into full swing let’s make sure that we get this valuable message out.

Throughout the year we will be highlighting these data through brief monthly reports in the *Bulletin*. For a complete copy of the NTDB Annual Report 2003, visit us online at our new Web address: <http://www.ntdb.org>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center’s data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.