

To the Editors:

Tobacco, alcohol and doctors

While delighted to see that the prestigious *Ceylon Medical Journal* has published an article on the important topic of tobacco, alcohol and doctors [1], and fully agreeing with much of what Carlo Fonseka has written, I am concerned about the potential misinterpretation of his passage about “Famous soft drug addicts”. He mentions the case of some famous people who used tobacco and later died “in the fullness of years and honours”. While he explains the reason for their ignorance of the likely consequences of their behaviour, the fact that they went on to enjoy a long life could suggest that tobacco is not as harmful as claimed.

There is of course a simple explanation for this apparent contradiction: using tobacco involves a gamble. While it kills about half of its long-term users, the other

half survives. This leads to only one small problem: individuals do not know into which half they belong. By the time one is diagnosed with a deadly or debilitating disease, it is too late to revise one’s decision. The problem is further magnified by the highly addictive nature of tobacco. At the time of taking the first puff, it would be wise to remember the high chance of an early death. Few opportunities in life offer such good odds as 50-50, and where the odds are likely to mean suffering and death, the gamble is best avoided.

References

1. Fonseka C. Tobacco, alcohol and doctors. *Ceylon Medical Journal* 2009; **54**: 71-4.

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