MCA Medical Council on Alcohol
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Alcoholis

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From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer 2025 issue of Alcoholis.

At the MCA we are working both in-person and on-line to maximise participation in our activities. As well as our student competitions which are a feature of summer at the MCA, we are of course planning our autumn Symposium. We are also starting work on two new projects, the first on Alcohol-Related Brain Damage in conjunction with the new Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Research at the University of Hull, and a second project on undergraduate alcohol education in the growing network of UK medical schools.

No/Lo Alcohol Drinks

The No/Lo Alcohol territory is rapidly expanding. It is clear however that there are complexities. In this issue we publish an article looking at the role of No/Lo alcohol for patients with advanced alcohol-related liver disease. This literature review reveals that perhaps not surprisingly given that we are still at an early stage in this area, more research is needed. Our annual essay prize for medical students was also on the topic of No/Lo alcohol and received a high number of entries; the winners will be announced at the end of the summer.

NAAD Competition

The biennial NAAD prize, open to medical, nursing and midwifery students, is closing on 31 July. Details are on the website and in this issue. The theme is on the relationship between alcohol and cancer, which is getting increasing recognition. Any readers of this issue of Alcoholis please do pass on the details to relevant audiences.

2025 MCA Symposium and Max Glatt lecture

The 2025 Symposium will be held in-person at the RCP in London on 19 November. The programme which is available to view in this issue of Alcoholis is on the theme of Alcohol and the Workplace. Talks will be of relevance to clinicians and researchers across the disciplines working on alcohol and health.

We are also delighted to announce that the Max Glatt lecture will be given by Dr Ed Day, who has had an illustrious career in the alcohol and health sphere with a particular focus on recovery. We are offering a special discount to occupational health professionals who are members of the Society of Occupational Medicine or the Faculty of Occupational Medicine.

Tickets are available now through the MCA website, do book as soon as possible to take advantage of the early bird offer.

Congratulations

The MCA would like to congratulate Dr Alastair MacGilchrist, chair of SHAAP, who has just been awarded an OBE. SHAAP has been at the forefront of action on alcohol and health in Scotland and this honour is well deserved.

What is the role of No and Low Alcohol Drinks in reducing alcohol consumption in patients with advanced Alcohol-Related Liver Disease: a literature review

This article is based on an oral poster presentation delivered at the Annual Conference of the Society for the Study of Addiction (SSA), 2024

Abdul Ghani Madadi (University of Cambridge); Mike Allison (Cambridge Liver Unit, NIHR Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre); Christopher Oldroyd (Cambridge Liver Unit, NIHR Cambridge Biomedical Research Centre)

Introduction

No and Low Alcohol Drinks (NoLos) are drinks which replicate the taste and appearance of alcoholic beverages, but with a significantly reduced alcohol content. Recent findings by Piper and Leyshon, 2023 have suggested that NoLos may help patients reduce their overall consumption of alcohol. As such, these NoLos could potentially help reduce alcohol consumption in patients with Alcohol Related Liver Disease (ARLD), a population that is strongly advised to be abstinent in order to reduce the likelihood of disease progression and hepatic decompensation and death (Seitz et al., 2018). This is of particular importance for patients with advanced stages of ARLD – specifically Alcohol Associated Hepatitis (AAH) and Alcohol Related Cirrhosis (ARC) – in whom abstinence from alcohol is the key predictor of short- and long-term outcomes (Seitz et al., 2018). Interest in whether or not NoLos can aid in reducing alcohol consumption is rising: a recent review by Marjot and Dhanda, 2025 points out the potential double-edged nature of NoLos, being associated with decreased alcohol consumption whilst potentially being a cause for relapse by being too similar to regular alcoholic drinks and thus causing craving for alcohol. Therefore, we conducted a literature search to gather any available literature which might help inform and guide clinicians and patients on the role of NoLos in reducing alcohol consumption in this AAH/ARC population.

NoLo Drinks – Definitions

In the UK, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2023 has defined alcohol-free and low alcohol drinks as containing no more than 0.05% and 1.2% alcohol by volume (ABV) respectively. However, as pointed out by Corfe, Hyde, and Shepherd, 2020, the regulation of NoLo drinks in the UK is in many cases left up to the industry itself (in particular, their labelling), with certain drinks that are marketed as 'alcohol-free' in fact containing an ABV of 0.5%. Furthermore, the definition of NoLo drinks differs by country, with some having definitions that are considerably more relaxed than the UK's (e.g. Finland considers drinks with ≤ 2.8% ABV as alcohol-free) (Corfe, Hyde, and Shepherd, 2020). As such, if NoLo drinks are used to reduce alcohol intake, the actual ABV of the drink should be confirmed so that alcohol is not unwittingly consumed. This is particularly important in populations who should be abstinent (i.e. ARLD patients), who may be using NoLo drinks as an aid to stop drinking.

Literature Search – Methodology

For this literature search, the databases Web of Science, Embase (Ovid), and Medline (Ovid) were all queried for literature dated from inception to 9th January 2024. This search was constructed using terms based on NoLos (NoLo/alcohol-free/ethanol removed/dealcohol*, etc.), ARLD (cirrhosis/ end stage liver disease/ Hepatitis, Alcoholic/, etc) and alcohol intake (harm* drinking/alcohol crav*, Alcohol Abstinence/, etc.). English-language studies were included that discussed NoLos in relation to patients at risk of/with liver damage and how NoLos could relate to decreased alcohol intake; studies were excluded if they focussed on non-alcoholic drinks other than NoLos (e.g. coffee), involved non-human subjects or were molecular/tissue-based studies, or if the study lacked relevance to ARLD patients.

This search produced 3,361 citations (819 from Embase, 281 from Medline, and 2,261 from Web of Science). After removal of duplicated and retracted articles, 3,116 citations remained. A title/abstract screen using the inclusion/exclusion criteria removed 2,680 citations, leaving 436 citations for a full text screen, of which 7 citations were deemed relevant.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1. Summary of Retrieved Literature Search Citations, modified from the SSA Annual Conference 2024

Citation	Publication Type	Key Findings
Altamirano et al., 2012	Prospective Study	1 – Alcohol free beer promoted 6-month abstinence in liver cirrhosis patients awaiting evaluation for liver transplant who started to drink alcohol free beer after being diagnosed with ARLD. 2 – However, patients who were already drinking alcohol free beer at the time of diagnosis of ARLD were less likely to become fully abstinent
Dimartino and Rao, 1999	Case Report	Non-alcoholic beer consumption was found to have increased the blood ethanol level of a liver failure patient.
Oldroyd et al., 2023	Systematic Review	Identified Altamirano et al., 2012 as promoting NoLo consumption as part of a systematic review
Parker and Holt, 2018	Narrative Review on Liver Transplantation Guidelines	NoLo consuming patients are deemed not abstinent when considering candidates for liver transplantation.
Rehm et al., 2016	Review	Suggests that NoLos may be problematic by not providing the same 'social lubricative' effects as regular alcohol.
Schaefer, 1987	Review	Suggests that NoLo consumption is theoretically safe for high-risk patients as it lacks the necessary ethanol content to cause harm.
Tandon, Fitzpatrick, and Krok, 2014	Case Report	Low alcohol beer worsened liver function in a patient due to the large quantities of low-strength alcohol being consumed.

The 7 citations retrieved are mixed in their support/opposition of NoLo use in ARLD patients, with the quality of evidence on either side generally being quite poor. In support of NoLo use, Altamirano et al., 2012 found that alcohol-free beer helped promote 6-month abstinence in ARLD patients waiting to be evaluated for liver transplantation (with Oldroyd et al.,2023 identifying this study as part of its systematic review). However, the sample size of this alcohol-free beer group was small (n=26), and no randomization was performed, reducing the reliability of this study. Furthermore, Altamirano et al. 2012 also identified that if a patient was already drinking alcohol-free beer at the time of diagnosis, they were less likely to become abstinent, limiting the support this article brings to the use of NoLos. The two case reports retrieved (Dimartino and Rao, 1999; Tandon, Fitzpatrick and Krok, 2014) oppose the use of NoLos in ARLD patients, with both finding that a non-insignificant amount of alcohol was consumed by drinking NoLos, leading to worsened liver function. Tandon, Fitpatrick, and Krok, 2014 makes specific mention to their patient not recognizing that 'non-alcoholic' drinks may still contain 0.5% ABV and thus may still cause harm. The two reviews retrieved oppose each other, with Rehm et al., 2016 highlighting that NoLos would fail to provide the desired effects of increased sociability when consumed, which may encourage relapse; Schaefer, 1987 suggests that truly alcohol-free drinks would not cause harm to high-risk individuals due to lacking any ethanol. However, both reviews do not provide evidence for their claims, instead relying on the theoretical outcomes of NoLo use. Finally, Parker and Holt, 2018 simply states that in patients being considered for liver transplantation, consumption of NoLo drinks would not be considered in line with abstinence, with implications on their eligibility to be placed on transplantation lists. Whilst this does not directly address whether NoLo consumption can reduce overall alcohol consumption, the implications of potentially not being considered for liver transplantation would still have important ramifications for patients.

Summary

As such, this demonstrates that the literature available on the use of NoLos in ARLD patients is limited and of poor quality: the strongest piece of evidence (Altamirano et al., 2012) has a small, unrandomized sample size, whilst the rest of literature available relies on theoretical arguments relating to individual cases. This highlights the need for high-quality research in relation to the potential consumption of NoLos in patients with ARLD to determine the risks and/or potential benefits of NoLo use in this population. In the meantime, patients should be made aware that if they chose to drink NoLos, they should ensure that their preferred beverage is in fact 'alcohol-free' by confirming the ABV listed on the packaging and not just trusting the more prominent label written on the front. Patients should also be informed that consumption of NoLos may impact their eligibility for liver transplantation if they were to need it in future.

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Studies from Literature Search

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- Tandon A., Fitzpatrick N., Krok K. (2014) "Non-alcoholic beer: A unique case of acute alcoholic hepatitis," Journal of General Internal Medicine : JGIM., 29(SUPPL. 1), pp. S394–S395.

Call for Regional Advisors

The MCA has a network of Regional Advisors across the country; academics and clinicians linked to the medical schools in their area with an interest in alcohol and health. The RAs are a vital part of the MCA remit to ensure students' education on alcohol-related health harm. We have some gaps in our current network, in particular in the newly opened Medical Schools.

If you are interested in taking the role or would like to find out more, please contact MCA Medical Director, Dominique.Florin@m-c-a.org.uk.

2025 NAAD Competition on Alcohol and Cancer

The biennial 2025 MCA National Alcohol Awareness Day (NAAD) Competition is to design an artwork and supporting infographic on the relationship between **alcohol and cancer.**

Your entry should be a double-sided A5 flyer which could be used for information in healthcare or other settings, destined at the general public.

The front of the flyer should display an original artwork and the back to include a supporting infographic with relevant facts and figures. Please use images with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi to ensure print quality. Please include the MCA logo and contact details on the back (downloadable here via the MCA website). The flyer can be either portrait or landscape and must be A5 size.

Entrants must be current medical, nursing or midwifery students in the UK.

Only single authored entries will be accepted. Work submitted must be the student's own.

The winning entrants will receive:

1st Prize	**£750**
2nd Prize	**£500**
3rd Prize	**£300**

To apply go to our website: **m-c-a.org.uk/education** and upload your entry (as jpg and pdf formats only).

On your application you will need to include the following:

- **Full name**
- **University**
- **Name of course and year of study**
- **Contact telephone number**
- **Contact e-mail**

The winning entries will be displayed at the MCA Annual Symposium on 19 November 2025. All 3 winners will receive a free place at this event and be awarded a certificate.

Opening date:	1st April 2025
Closing date:	31st July 2025

Cancer Prevention Action Week - Alcohol & Cancer: 23-29 June 2025

The MCA is a supporter of Cancer Prevention Action Week 2025, organised by the World Cancer Research Fund, which is highlighting the links between alcohol and cancer.

The World Cancer Research Fund is hosting a FREE webinar for health professionals on *Thursday 26 June at 12.00pm* where they will explore the science linking alcohol with cancer risk and provide practical strategies to support the work of health professionals with their patients and communities.
Book your free place: here

To find out more about Cancer Prevention Action week and access FREE resources for your patients and clients go to: www.wcrf.org/CPAW25

2025 MCA Symposium on Alcohol & Health: *Alcohol & the Workplace*

Wednesday 19 November 2025 at the RCP, London

#MCASymp2025

Programme

09:00 Registration & Refreshments

09:30 Welcome

09:40 'The assessment of an employee with an alcohol problem', **Dr David Fox, Health Partners UK**

10:05 **Dr Zaid Al-Najjar, Practitioner Health** Supporting NHS Health professionals

10:30 Q&A Discussion

10:50 Refreshments Break and visit Exhibitor Stands

11:10 MCA Annual General Meeting (AGM) *MCA members only

11:50 Competition Winners' Presentations

12:00 **Max Glatt Lecture, Dr Ed Day, UK Government National Recovery Champion**

13:00-13.50 Lunch and visit Exhibitor Stands

13:50 Welcome Back - Afternoon session

13:55 **Dr Mark Cairns, Civil Aviation Authority**

14:20 **Dr Nick Jenkins, DVLA** 'Alcohol Use Disorder and Driver Licensing'

14:45 **Prof Kim Wolff, King's College London** Testing and monitoring

15:10 Q&A Panel and Discussion

15:35 Close – Refreshments available

Booking & Pricing	Regular	**Early Bird** (available until 28 July 2025)
Member	£160	£145
Member - Student & Retired	£110	£95
Non-Member	£235	£210
Non-Member - Student & Retired	£160	£145
SOM & FOM Members discount	£200	£185

To book visit: www.m-c-a.org.uk/symposia/2025

Signed up delegates will be able to view the entire symposium online after the event.

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The Alcoholis bulletin for health care professionals, is published by the Medical Council on Alcohol. Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the MCA. We welcome any articles or comments from other parties which may be published.

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