

PLEADING FOR A GOOD USE OF ALCOHOL IGNITION INTERLOCK DEVICES

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Alcohol ignition interlock devices are a very efficient tool now widely used either for a preventive use in professional drivers and for a better control in offenders.

If preventive used generally not face crucial problems out of ethical rules in data management and privacy of employees, offenders programs are not so easy to implement.

Due to its efficiency to prevent directly somebody to drink and drive, many governments and policy makers propose laws and regulation based on alcohol interlocks.

If most of them take into account international experience, the risk exist in some policy makers to propose “home made programs” based on their so called “national expertise”.

Such approaches non crossing international experience and actual scientific knowledge can bring them to loose on the way some essential points concerning alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems.

As a medical doctor, experienced since a long time in alcohol related problems on the road but also in addiction problems, I always try to combine efficiency and humanism in the management of patients.

Efficiency rests on evidences, studies and intends to improve a situation.

Humanism rests on a vision of human being and of society, not only based on control or punishment, but also on positive changes of personal behaviours through education and awareness.

On the side of efficiency, alcohol interlocks have demonstrated a positive effect in prevention of drink driving as far as they are installed in a vehicle.

In alcohol offenders, they have demonstrated a positive effect after removal only if installed in the frame of an efficient follow-up linked with educational measures.

They have clearly less or no positive effects if simply installed in the offender’s car without such environment.

On the side of humanism, we can observe that policy makers generally apply to drink driving a model similar to speed limit violations: frequency of controls and enforcement of sanctions, sometime moderated by the “educational” effect of demeritus point system are supposed to change the driver’s behaviour and to bring him to be compliant with driving rules.

This model is not so efficient with alcohol due the addiction of certain drivers makes uncertain the voluntary control of their alcohol consumption, and also to euphoria and de inhibition of alcohol disturbing self evaluation and pushing the driver to over estimate his ability to drive.

Shall we only extend police controls, enforced still more sanctions and put under only technical monitoring to improve efficiency against drink driving and did not we reach a level of attempt to social and professional insertion difficult to keep in prosecuted drivers?

Even a hard long suspension of the driving licence, a real immediate imprisonment sentence, a mandatory medical follow up under justice control even in jail do not decrease the recidivism rate below certain values.

Is punishment the best tool and the only tool in traffic safety? Other approaches have brought the evidence of a better level of prevention of recidivism

The first equipments installed more than twenty years ago, without monitoring or follow up, were left after a few years due to numerous violations.

The need for an implementation rapidly appeared in the frame of monitoring and follow up, linked with a data recording and management system.

The lack or the insufficiency of psychological and medical accompanying measures seems to be the main reason for this non persisting effect after removal of the equipment.

Demonstration was given by the main program managers or evaluators at the ICADTS working group on alcohol interlocks during the ICADTS conference in Oslo, august 2010:

When the interlock programs is a part of a monitoring and accompanying framework, the recidivism rate stay 2 or 3 time below even several years after removal, compared to programs based on the only "hard control".

No one expert proposes anymore alcohol ignition interlocks only as a passive safety system without monitoring, periodic inspection of the equipment, and without data recording and management, without a real probation program accompanying the driver.

Other countries, far from a necessary adaptation of the sanction to each individual situation, propose programs purely administrative, with only a pressure enforced, based on the idea that each individual is supposed to find alone his own way to "redemption".

Policy makers generally have confusion between alcoholics and alcohol offenders.

They still think in term of hard control and do not consider enough the role of a positive follow up as a tool of long term prevention of recidivism. Often they leave to the provider the management of data and incident reports and let them becoming a kind of probation officer, with a risk of non ethical consequences and of non justified additional costs.

The provider has to be efficient, by providing data and information to the person or body in charge of the program under the control of the justice and must not be in a direct position of justice partner. Non profit partners of the Justice, like Prevention Routiere in France, appear to be a better choice with the lack of public money and employees in the administration.

We will have to avoid financial interest disturbing best practices, as well as with providers, and administrations. The cost of a program will have to be controlled in all its aspects and even if offender, the participant as not to pay unjustified costs.

Our vision of the help that the Society can bring to an individual guilty is might be different from one country to the other, but a humanist vision seems more appropriate to a sustainable change of the risk behaviour.

Even "hard laws countries", come today to discuss their policies of long term suspension of driving licences and to propose early regranting of licences in the frame of real interlock programs.

We will have probably soon to discuss the real social exclusion represented by the suspension of the driving licence, and to propose more efficient procedures in term of prevention of recidivism. In the same time, we will have to generalize the installation of alcohol interlocks buses, trucks and special categories of professional drivers to improve the social acceptance of alcohol interlocks.

Far from any opposition between prevention and enforcement, we will have to propose to gather those two ways in the frame of individualised procedures of probation mixing control and accompanying measures when the self capacity of the driver fail to manage sufficiently his behaviour.