

## Friends of NIAAA Briefing Introduction - October 8, 2008

I am honored to welcome you in the name of the Friends of NIAAA to this briefing on recent advances in our research, thinking, and knowledge about alcohol abuse and alcoholism that brings the promise of new opportunities for intervention and treatment. The Friends of NIAAA is a non profit group of organizations and individuals whose purpose is to support and advocate for effective, science-based, realistic, and community-focused prevention and treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence and to support NIAAA in their mission of providing leadership in the national effort to reduce alcohol-related problems.

I hope that for the next hour or two we can turn our attention away from the massive problems of excess in the financial markets that currently plague every family in the United States to another problem of excessive drinking that has and continues to affect the health and wellbeing of every family in the United States in one way or another. Heavy drinking and alcohol dependence represent the third leading cause of preventable death and the second leading cause of disability among 18-44 year olds in the U.S. Behind the anonymous numbers, death and disability have a face that you can recognize in your family, friends or neighbors. Today's Washington Post

tells the story of Peter Vold, the 19 year old high school drop out, who died from alcohol poisoning, and whose body was dragged by his panicked teenage friends to a Loudon County elementary school parking lot destroying the lives of all three teens and the 24 year old who bought them the alcohol. Alcohol and its tragic effects can be seen in the face of the three young high school students in Howard county who were stopped at red light and were killed or maimed when a multiple DUI offender crashed into their car. Research into the causes and the cures of this disorder offers the best hope for effective interventions, treatments and policies.

Before I introduce the speakers, I want to say a heartfelt “thank you” to all the Members of Congress and their staffs who were instrumental in the recent passage of the mental health parity legislation. It was a long and hard struggle to secure its passage and your efforts on behalf of that legislation and the many consumers it will benefit is very much appreciated. Although they cannot be here in person today, I also want to give a special thank you to Congressmen Kennedy and Ramstad no only for their leadership on the parity legislation but also for their leadership in the Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus. The parity legislation is a fitting legacy for Congressman Ramstad as he prepares to retire from his House seat after 18 years in office.

Now I want to introduce the speakers who will tell you why “Alcoholism Isn’t What It Used to Be” our topic for today. Our two main speakers, Drs. Kenneth Sher and Mark Willenbring will be formally introduced by the person who it is my privilege to introduce. Dr. Ting-Kai Li has been the Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) since 2002. He received his MD from Harvard and has a distinguished of research into the effects of alcohol on the body and brain with over 400 journal and book chapters, numerous awards for his scientific accomplishments including the Jellinek, James B. Isaacson, Smithers, and Tharp awards and an endowed chair in his name at the Indiana University School of Medicine. He is a member of the Institute of Medicine, and numerous professional societies. Dr Li recently announced that he will be retiring and we wanted to take this opportunity to acknowledge his enormous contributions to the advancement of science and research at NIAAA during his tenure and his enduring contributions to science. From the Friends of NOAAA I want to give this award recognizing his scientific leadership to this distinguished researcher and leader who has dedicated his life to advancing our knowledge of alcoholism, its causes and cures.