

Society of Medical Friends of Wine



A Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Corporation, FEIN 94-6088159

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NEWSLETTER

April 2025

Is All This Information on Wine and Health Good for You?

Robert Blumberg, M.D.

By all accounts these are challenging times for the wine industry. Hardly a week goes by without some article raising issues about alcohol, including wine, and health or talking about plummeting sales in wine worldwide. To what extent the former is contributing to the latter is uncertain, but quite possibly it is a significant contributor.

One of the objectives of our organization is to promote a balanced approach to the review and discussion of the benefits and detriments of moderate wine consumption, and I would certainly hope that is evident to members of our Society and to readers of this newsletter.

In fact, I just reread the article I wrote for our September 2024 newsletter where I pondered how best a physician should discuss drinking recommendations and concerns with a patient. You can access our older newsletters at our website: <https://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/>

NASEM, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, recently issued a report that the consequences of moderate alcohol consumption on overall mortality and cardiovascular mortality in particular are beneficial compared both to total abstinence and to excess consumption.

Shortly afterwards, the Surgeon General of the United States came out with a rather stern warning that alcohol use was an ignored cancer risk, and played a role with a least seven different cancers.

Our very own Dr. Dan Bikle, our medical and scientific advisor, follows the literature carefully on this subject and recently communicated his thoughts in response to a request for feedback from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. I quote Dr. Bikle:

“As has been pointed out by the recent NASEM report, the consequences of moderate alcohol consumption on overall mortality and cardiovascular mortality in particular are beneficial compared both to total abstinence and excess consumption. I accept that there are cancers, breast and colon in particular, that appear to have a greater risk with alcohol consumption, but mortality from cardiovascular disease greatly exceeds that of either cancer. As a member of the Society of Medical Friends of Wine (SMFW) I promote the healthy use of wine in our mission to educate the public on both the benefits of moderate consumption and the dangers of excess consumption. In this we (SMFW) share the approach of the Reynaud Society. While it may be ok for the Surgeon General to call attention to the risks of cancer with alcohol consumption, it is also incumbent for the Surgeon General to balance this call by drawing attention to the cardiovascular benefits of moderate alcohol consumption, which we believe accrue more to wine than other forms of alcohol given its higher content of polyphenols and flavonoids.”

The debate and controversial opinions on wine and health are not about to abate. Our role as a Society remains to be vigilant and objective, and to share this information with our members and followers.

On a personal level as I continue to weigh how to counsel those who seek my medical advice, I reflect on my personal encounters with wine over the past several months. A family Passover dinner where three generations assembled to retell an old tale and to enjoy good food accompanied by wine and blessings over the wine. Several dinners with good friends where we brought cherished bottles from our cellars. My monthly wine tasting group’s discovery of Pinot Noir from the south coast of California. Another tasting of prized yet affordable Cabernets from Napa Valley. A selected tasting representing a friend’s two-decade collection of a Cabernet from a tiny Calistoga vineyard.

Each of these occasions included memories and reminiscences, laughter, discussions and disagreements on aromas and palates, and just plain fun. To me, all matters that are extremely important contributions to the enjoyment of life and to the reduction of stress. And as I mentioned in my article in that September newsletter, all very important considerations in the decision of whether or not to open a bottle for one's well-being, but all unfortunately impossible to measure in a scientifically controlled study that might show up in your local media.

Reflections on the State of the Wine Industry

Robert Blumberg, M.D.

While Wine and Health is a large focus of our mission as a Society, the health of the wine industry is not necessarily so. But, in my opinion, it should not be ignored either.

As mentioned in the start of the above article, the health of the wine industry is of concern and makes its way into the press very frequently these days. The reasons are multifactorial. While concerns over wine and health may be contributing to reduced consumption, this is certainly not the only reason and may well not even be a major reason.

The wine business has always been cyclical. Boom and bust. For several decades after World War Two, Europe remained economically so distressed that bottles of first growth Bordeaux and Burgundy could be had for a relative pittance. Second through fifth growth Bordeaux could be purchased for \$25 to \$35 per case through the 1960's, and for not that much more in the '70's. Regional wines meant for current consumption could be had for around \$1 a bottle. I remember shops in France and Spain that would fill your empty bottle direct from their cask. If you "borrowed" one of their bottles, the deposit on the bottle was more than the cost of the wine.

Our founding Executive Secretary, noted author and historian, Leon Adams, loved this. Leon always said "if wine is going to be an accepted, everyday beverage in this country, good wine needed to be as cheap as milk".

On the other hand, members of our Society were very much part of the movement, often to Leon's dismay, to seek out rarer and pricier wines and to put wines away in a cellar, to appreciate in quality and value, over time.

As the world economy improved. As incomes rose, and people travelled more. As populations increased, the number of potential wine drinkers increased. Yet the number of first growth vineyards was largely fixed, so not surprisingly the price of fine wine increased, often dramatically.

Burgeoning economies outside of Western Europe and the United States minted new multi-millionaires whose interest in collecting, if not always drinking, wine fueled the inflation in wine prices. I remember being in a St. Emilion tasting room a few years back. The lady behind the bar spoke fluent English, French, and Chinese, and while we were there several very well-dressed Asian tourists came in to taste and buy.

Based on the turmoil in the wine business we are now reading about, it may be that wine prices just got too far ahead of themselves to sustain increasing consumption. World politics with waxing and waning economies contributes to volatility in demand and pricing, and the current conflict over potential tariffs is about the last thing the world wine business needs now.

Not a day goes by that I do not receive an offer for a deeply discounted wine, either under its own label or more likely a label of convenience, with guarantees of 95-point scores and either provenance from the same or an immediately adjacent vineyard that is the source of wine selling for hundreds of dollars a bottle.

This of course is not just a recent phenomenon. A very good friend for years made a very good living as a wine broker. Wineries with a prestige label and a prestige price would not infrequently find themselves with more inventory than they could sell at their desired price. Rather than lower the prestige of the property by lowering the price, my friend would find these batches and broker a sale to the Trader Joe's of the world to bottle the wines under the store's label. The winery thus cleared inventory, maintained the price and prestige of their own label, and consumers more interested in taste than prestige had some nice affordable bottles. Perhaps Leon would have been pleased.

It is hard to tell when or how the current economic cycle will resolve. I suspect the economy and world politics will play the major role, but health concerns over wine use will probably persist as a factor as well. The role of tariffs is of special concern. One might argue that tariffs on imports could be a boon for domestic wineries, since this country imports far more wine than it exports. But the wellbeing of the entire wine and food industry is so intertwined, between producers, wholesalers, retailers, importers, and restaurants, that I find it hard to believe that what is bad for one sector will really be good for another. I especially fear for the viability of the smaller merchants who sell both imported and domestic wines should the very high proposed tariffs not be rescinded.

So, keep this in mind as you frequent your local merchant and winery and appreciate the immense challenges they are now feeling. Support and help them to sustain themselves. Our upcoming visit to Lodi is such an opportunity.

Wine growers in Lodi tend to be small, independent people fulfilling their dreams. Trying new grapes and new wines. Maintaining and elevating a historic region. I am glad our Society is planning a visit and a chance to show our support.

Wine and Cheese—Such a Natural Combination

Robert Blumberg

Every year I very much look forward to our annual seminar featuring our good friend and cheese expert Janet Fletcher. This year's theme for cheese was "**Best Newcomers**"

Janet selected seven cheeses for us, and I suspect none of us had experienced any of these before.

Shabby Shoe, a goat from Blakesville Creamery in Wisconsin, was aged 60 days. It retained some goatiness along with creaminess, and had a texture between soft and firm that led to an earthy, mushroomy finish. This was delightful with Chardonnay and had enough age to offer complexity.

Hooper, a cow and goat blend from Vermont Creamery. A washed rind cheese, just slight barnyard character, with a buttery, rich, tart, and lengthy finish. Both the dry Sauternes and the Pinot Noir brought praise as accompaniments.

Truffle Brie, cow's milk from Point Reyes Farmstead. A spicy, truffly, soft cheese, less brie like than its French colleagues. The dry Sauternes was a nice foil, and the combination worked well.

Nababbo, a goat cheese from CasArrigoni, Italy. Washed orange rind, strongly acidic leading to a tart and flavorful finish with earthiness and obvious goat provenance. The aged Bordeaux went particularly well with this one.

Alpenhorn, a raw cow's milk from Switzerland. This is a Gruyere like cheese aged 6 to 8 weeks with a natural onion shell color rind. A delicious, firm cheese with the finish of caramelized onions and so much complexity. The aged California Cabernet went beautifully.

Sneek 1000 Day Gouda from Frisian Farms, Iowa. A delicious firm cow's milk cheese with sweetness and slight crunch, very much in the style of an aged Dutch Gouda. Wonderful, creamy, complex and fudgy. Another treat for the aged California Cabernet and the Bordeaux.

Withersbrook Blue, a raw cow's milk from Jasper Hill Farm, Vermont. What a unique blue. Soaked in iced cider this is a pungent, cidery, sweet blue with some age. Rich, sweet, and delicious for blue cheese fanciers. The dry Sauternes was an excellent accompaniment.

Each guest had five wines poured in front of their place so as to be able to taste back and forth during the cheese tasting, and opinions were solicited as to which wine(s) went well with which cheese(s).

2022 Neyers Chardonnay “304” Sonoma County: This was a very fresh, steely, appley wine that sees no oak. Good acidity produces a very lovely and fruity sensation on the palate. Nice pairing with young fresh cheeses, including goat.

2023 Chateau de Suduiraut Lions de Suduiraut Blanc Sec: Many Sauternes chateaux are now offering a dry wine produced from Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc to complement their classic sweet wines. This one from Chateau Suduiraut was complex and vanilla like due to oak aging and possessed a rich finish. A complex dry white to go with complex cheeses.

2006 Aubert Pinot Noir UV Vineyard Sonoma Coast: This nicely aged and mature California Pinot Noir was a cellar donation from Jim Gallagher Ph.D. for us to enjoy. This is a rich red with generous alcohol and a sweet finish. Enchantingly earthy flavors are present. This wine shows how excellent (and cheese friendly) California Pinot Noir can be in the right hands; and how age worthy they can be!

2004 Pedroncelli Dry Creek Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (double magnum format): A special donation from our president, Maynard Johnston, M.D. Wines from Pedroncelli’s Dry Creek vineyards from this era were made in a lighter and more elegant style than many of the big and hardy Cabernets of the past two decades, and this wine fits that description. Balanced, lovely, and elegant, and drinking very well as one would hope from aging in such a large format.

1995 Chateau Ducru Beaucaillou: A donation from the cellar of Barry and Joan Boothe. Amazingly youthful for a 30-year-old wine, with good tannin levels and abundant acidity. Tart blackberry and currants on the palate. Very much a Bordeaux and very much a partner for the complex, dry, aged cheeses.

**Save the Date
December 7, 2025**

Hopefully this description of last year’s event will make you want to attend this year’s. We have reserved with Janet Sunday December 7, 2025, so please make a note in your calendars to save the date. More information and sign-up opportunity will be sent out closer to the date.

**Another Save the Date
September 26, 2025**

**Dinner at the French Club - Cercle de l'Union
San Francisco
Friday, September 26, 2025**

The Society has been featuring wonderful events at the French Club for decades. In this era when many of us may dine out less often and many venues are overwhelmed with noise and informality, a step back into the classic French cuisine, outstanding service, and quiet elegant décor of the French Club is not to be missed. Michelin star quality food and service! All accompanied by a wondrous array of wine.

Mark this date on your calendars now!!!

THANK YOU, DONORS

From December 2024 to April 2025, several members have recently gifted cash donations to the Society. *Thanks to the following individuals for your generosity:*

Dr. James Gallagher, Dr. Roger Ecker, Barry and Joan Boothe, Marshall Berol, Dr. James Shapiro, Dr. Mary Ann Skidmore and Dr. Jack McElroy.

Thanks to those who have donated or purchased wines poured at recent 2024-2025 SFMW events: Dr. Maynard Johnston, Dr. Bob Blumberg, Barry Boothe, Jim Gallagher, Philip Hicks, and Dr. David Schwartz.

Cash Donations help to support the costs of operating our non-profit organization. *Donations help to close the gap between income and operating expense.* Donation checks may be sent to the Society of Medical Friends of Wine or you may send through *Zelle*. The Society is a qualified 501 (c)(3) organization. FEIN: 94-6088159. *Please send checks to this address: SMFW, 4460 Redwood Highway, Suite 16-110, San Rafael, CA 94903.* Please remember the Susan Guerguy Memorial Fund as you consider your donation.

Donations of Wine in excellent condition from a member's cellar are always appreciated and can be used for future wine education dinners and events, thereby reducing the overall cost to attendees, and providing a focus for educational discussions. These *gifts in kind* will be acknowledged with a Donor Form for your records. Contact Cellarmaster Dr. Bob Blumberg.

Wine Tasting in and near Lodi, California by Elizabeth Kass, MD in the September 2024 issue of the SMFW newsletter will provide additional background for our upcoming May 3rd wine tour: <https://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/resources/SMFW%20Newsletter%20Sep%202024.pdf>

Additional News

The Society thanks SMFW member David Parker, for his presentation at the 86th Annual Dinner regarding recent alcohol and health studies, policy groups and industry concerns with the aforementioned surgeon general advisory's regarding alcohol use and cancer risk. David is the founder and CEO of Benchmark Wine Group, the largest rare and back vintage wine reseller in

the country, following a career in high tech management and engineering. He publishes the Wine Market Journal and Spirits Market Journal and has formerly owned vineyards in California and Oregon. Active throughout the rare wine retailers industry, David has spoken on wine-based subjects at elite private university business schools, Columbia Law school and to other sectors. At the Annual Dinner, David summarized his analysis of wine and health data from peer reviewed studies at the National Institutes of Health and other government entities. He offered his perspective and concerns with the manner in which such data is interpreted by health policy makers, and was joined by his guest Lewis Perdue to further elaborate on these perceived limitations. A lively discussion ensued amongst the dinner participants, with a pledge from President Maynard Johnston to continue to develop this compelling topic at future Society events.

The Board of Directors welcomes member Pepper Wilkes Karansky who will volunteer her skills and experience from her career with the National Parks Service to the leadership of SMFW.

In Memoriam – Dr. Marion Koerper Blumberg



A trailblazing pediatric hematologist and longtime leader of the Society departed this world on December 18th, 2024, leaving lasting memories of her contributions to SMFW as a friend, past-president and member of the Board of Directors. You may have met Marion in action if you attended the annual Cheese and Wine tastings, the creation of which she inspired during her year of Presidency, or possibly at the end of the evening when Marion would collect your nametag to recycle once again. She fought a valiant fight against a mighty disease adversary, and participated fully in SMFW events close to the end of her remarkable life, leaving her spouse Dr. Robert Blumberg and family and friends with the spark to move forward in the midst

of this profound loss. At the 86th Annual Dinner at Poggio in January 2025, Dr. Elizabeth Kass delivered a loving tribute to the passing of Marion, recalling her influence on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee, and also her enjoyment of gathering with society members to explore fine wines and a shared meal while conversing on a variety of topics with whomever she met. We will remember her always and invite those of you who knew Marion to share your comments as well. - The Executive Committee