

Pinot Noir powders

In the early 1950s posters informed Parisians of the health risks of drinking wine. The Academy of Medicine had found it was definitely unhealthy to drink more than one liter of wine a day.

Since those halcyon days the dose deemed compatible with good health has been whittled down almost homoeopathic levels. Accordingly, the complications of the grape have often given way to those of the poppy, so that in some hospitals medical students have never seen delirium tremens and misdiagnose it as an acute variant of mad cow disease.

Worse still, even though drinking a glass of red wine a day has been claimed to improve endothelial function, the ingredients of de-alcoholised wine have been rumored to achieve the same effect. While working at a meeting to improve my own endothelial function, I met a researcher who was using an ingredient called resveratrol to prevent cancer in mice under the watchful eye of the Institutional Scientific Review Board, the Rodent Ethics Committee, the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Control Agency, the General Accounting Office, the Antifraud Police, the Evidence Based Medicine Squad, and the League against Duplicate Publication.

I learnt that in addition to resveratrol wine has other beneficial polyphenols and related compounds: catechin (reduced tumors by 40% in Californian mice); quercetin (inhibits growth of breast cancer cells); and other phenols that inhibit low density lipoprotein oxidation and platelet aggregation and may prevent atherosclerosis. Some scientists now think that the "French paradox" is all hooey and that Frenchmen (but not rats) will soon be in for it. Resveratrol, incidentally, antagonizes oestrogen binding and induces cancer apoptosis; it may be purchased as a powder.

Distressed by having to swallow powders to restore my own flagging endothelial function, I was further discouraged by a letter in the *Lancet*. It reported a study in which many subjects could not tell red wine from white. The study came from Nuits St Georges; the subjects were presumably French and not intruders from Greater Shengen or Outer Euroland, which shows that the errors disseminated by the Academy of Medicine half a century ago have now come back to haunt us.