

Alcohol and other drugs – terminology

A phrase I often hear is “alcohol and drugs” (or sometimes “drugs and alcohol”).

I would argue that health sector workers should use the phrase “*alcohol and other drugs*” to come across as informed and credible, giving an accurate picture to the general public that alcohol IS a drug.

To illustrate this, let’s think of words that belong in the set known as “drugs”.

We might come up with things like caffeine, cannabis, ecstasy, heroin, tobacco, etc.

Alcohol also belongs in this set, as follows:

Alcohol - caffeine - cannabis -
ecstasy - heroin - tobacco etc

DRUGS

To give an example which might help clarify this argument I would like you to think about the set known as “dogs”.

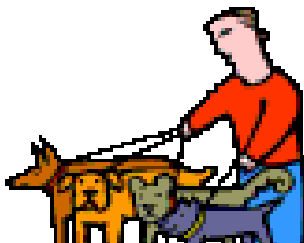
In this set we might find (for example) Poodles, Rottweilers, Labradors or Alsatians.

Poodles - Rottweilers -
Labradors – Alsatians, etc

DOGS

If we see a guy with 3 Alsatians, a Poodle, a Rottweiler and a Labrador, we don’t describe him as having “Alsatians and *dogs*”.

He has “Alsatians and *other dogs*”.



If we say “Alsatians and *dogs*”, it sounds as if we think Alsatians are not actually dogs.

In the same way, if we say “alcohol & drugs” or “drugs and alcohol”, it sounds as if we think that alcohol is not actually a drug.

So my challenge to the health sector is to use the phrase “alcohol and other drugs” to inform our communities accurately.

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