

## What Will It Cost If We Lose ETOH? ETOH's Value and the Economic Implications of its Discontinuation

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### **Introduction**

It is challenging to analyse the value of an information service such as the **ETOH (Alcohol and Alcohol Problems Science) Database**, which provides 'One Stop Shopping' to the alcohol literature. The costs of losing such a service are both measurable and immeasurable.

### **Measurable Costs**

These are based on the cost of having to search several alternative information sources previously indexed and abstracted by *ETOH*.

### **Immeasurable Costs**

These are based on the premise that, if several sources must be searched, there is an increased risk that key information will not be discovered. The potential for financial loss through duplication of effort and uninformed decision making is intangible, yet must be acknowledged.

Three main cost calculations are presented, as summarized below:

- 1. The annual cost of producing *ETOH* (\$0.4 million) is less than 0.1% of the total 2004 NIAAA budget of \$430 million. *ETOH* is inexpensive for a service that is strongly aligned to the NIAAA Mission.**
- 2. Discontinuing *ETOH* would result in the loss of an investment, accumulated over a period of 33 years, with a present day value estimated at over \$6 million.**
- 3. The loss of efficient 'One Stop Shopping' that *ETOH* offers to searchers of alcohol-related information, has measurable costs. Search-related costs incurred by the alcohol research community, which includes NIAAA grantees, will by far exceed the cost of running *ETOH*. If only 1000 researchers save 10 hours of time per year at \$30 per hour, plus \$100 per year in connect and download charges for commercial database services, the annual cost of running *ETOH* is justified. Per researcher, it translates to a cost savings of \$400 per year, based on a very conservative number of searches, and the hourly rate of a research assistant.**

The main financial impact on NIAAA:

**If *ETOH* is discontinued, the additional costs borne by researchers (# 3 above) will inevitably be 'charged back' to NIAAA resulting in:**

- 1. Increased cost for NIAAA in grants or**
- 2. Less research funded.**

An elaboration of the 3 cost calculations follows.

### **1. Annual Cost of ETOH in relation to Total NIAAA Budget**

The current annual budget of both *ETOH* and the *Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Thesaurus* is estimated to be no more than \$0.4 million. Some of the costs include:

- \$130,000 for salaries (2FTEs)
- \$70,000 for indexing/abstracting approximately 4800 records per year.
- \$10,000 for *AOD Thesaurus* maintenance
- \$25,000 for acquisitions
- \$1400 for software license

This represents less than 0.1% of the total NIAAA 2004 Budget of \$4 30 million.

As a service, *ETOH* is justifiable, inexpensive, and strongly aligned to the first and fourth statements of NIAAA's mission:

- Conducting and **supporting** research in a wide range of scientific areas...
- Translating and **disseminating** research findings to health care providers, researchers, policymakers and the public.

### **2. Lost Investment**

Archival Databases quickly lose value because people generally want to search current literature or a time range that includes the present. Once archived, databases lose visibility and those new to the field are less likely to learn about them.

#### **Total Investment in *ETOH* since 1971**

This is estimated to be a minimum of \$6 million in present value. It does not include the cost of the development of the *AOD Thesaurus*, a remarkable tool for describing and understanding this complex field.

Some elements in estimating a value:

Present value of indexing 130,000 records at \$14.50 per record:	\$1.885 million
Present Value of staff salaries totaling \$130,000 over 33 years:	\$4.3 million
Cost of conversion to Web 1996 (licensing fee plus staff):	\$ 13,000
Present Value of annual software license fee:	\$ 9,800

### **3. Cost of Losing 'One Stop Shopping'**

We have pointed out that *ETOH* is not a biomedical database and that the termination of *ETOH* would necessitate searching many other sources including:

- Research Databases
- Library Catalogs
- Individual Organizational Web sites and Information Portals

#### **Overriding Costs**

In addition to specific database-related costs, it must be acknowledged that searching multiple databases requires time-consuming actions such as:

- Selecting and tracking down access to appropriate databases,
- Rewriting search strategies for each resource searched,
- Dealing with duplication.

These activities could add a minimum of 1 hour, on average, to the time taken for a standard *ETOH* search. This is almost certainly an underestimate, but will be used for subsequent calculations.

### **Research Databases**

The key databases that index alcohol literature are *Medline (PubMed)*, *PsycINFO*, *ERIC*, *EMBASE*, *Sociological Abstracts*, *Criminal Justice Abstracts*, *NCJRS* (National Criminal Justice Reference Service) and ISI's *Web of Science/ Current Contents*, in particular the Life and Social & Behavioral Sciences products. Only *PubMed*, *ERIC* and *NCJRS* are available free on the Web. Although *PubMed* is free, many academic researchers chose to search the *Medline* version through a vendor such as Ovid, which has a superior search interface.

Anyone working in a large academic setting will have online access to *PsycINFO*, *EMBASE*, *Sociological Abstracts*, and *Criminal Justice Abstracts*. However, many other institutions, such as small research centers and government agencies, are often unable to afford the large licensing fees that vendors charge for all-staff access, and depend on the library for librarian-mediated searches of commercial services, which are charged back to the researcher.

For a *PsycINFO* search through *Dialog*, in addition to the online cost, there will be a cost of \$0.60 per short record. A search for information on **Underage Drinking** on *PsycINFO*, 2000-2002 came up with 17 citations, for a minimum charge of \$10. *PsycINFO* is accessible to individuals through the American Psychological Association (APA) at a cost of \$11.95 for a 24 hour period if one registers each time at the APA Web site.

### **Library Catalogs.**

A search for **Underage Drinking** on *ETOH*, 2000-2002, retrieved 153 records. Of these, 14 were books or book chapters, and 39, organizational reports. Although some databases index books and reports, for a comprehensive list, as an alternative to *ETOH*, one would have to search Library catalogs, an additional time consuming step. Not all library catalogs are readily accessible. Indexing is not as in depth as a typical research database and libraries rarely catalog individual book chapters in edited works.

### **Organizational Web Sites and Public Information Portals**

The 39 organizational reports from the **Underage Drinking** search were from a variety of organizations. *ETOH* staff regularly scans numerous Web sites for resources to add to the database. This cannot be accomplished by Internet searches via search engines. Publicly funded searchable Web information portals do exist which index this type of literature, some examples being *SAMHSA FASD Center for Excellence Database* and the *Virtual Clearinghouse on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs*. However, it should be pointed out that these services tend to be highly focused in topic and come nowhere close to *ETOH* in scope of coverage. In conclusion, searching for organizational reports on specific topics is very time consuming, even in this age of Web based electronic publishing.

### **Commercial Information Portals**

Services such as *ScienceDirect* are usually limited to selected publisher(s), and are not well indexed. These do not replace well-indexed research databases, such as *ETOH*.

### **Who are ETOH Users?**

They are members of groups such as the Kettil Bruun Society (218 members), Research Society on Alcoholism (1400 members), and SALIS (130 members) to name a few. Many are NIAAA grantees, who may have to use their grant money to cover search costs. A total of 2,150 Web sites around the world provide a link to *ETOH*. Based on the amount of literature published on alcohol, there are obviously many more than 1000 researchers searching alcohol-related topics and they, or their staff, are undoubtedly searching *ETOH* much more frequently than 10 times per year. The hourly rate of \$30 is conservative to average in summer students and research assistants doing searches.

### **Summary**

In summary, the loss of *ETOH* as a centralized, comprehensive, and thoroughly indexed resource will generate both measurable and immeasurable costs to the worldwide community of alcohol researchers, whether recipients of NIAAA grants or otherwise, as well as others listed in NIAAA's Mission: health care providers, policymakers, and the public.

### Note:

This document was written with limited access to budget information and other data. The authors are confident that any estimates made are reasonable and conservative.

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