

Do high altitude vineyards hold the key to a longer life?

23 Nov 2004 by JR

This year's winner of the annual [Geoffrey Roberts Award](#) is Professor Roger Corder, head of the Department of Experimental Therapeutics at the William Harvey Research Institute in London.

Professor Corder spent his £3000 travelling between his London lab and Sardinia this summer, researching the wines drunk in the island's hilly eastern Nuoro region where an unusual cluster of centenarians lives.

He and his team had already published work linking red wine with longevity in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* (414: 863-864; 20 Dec 2001). He wanted to continue this work by studying whether the consequence of reduced heart disease in people who consume red wine daily might be increased longevity, but funding for such a project from the obvious medical bodies was not forthcoming. The judges of the Geoffrey Roberts Award - Neville Abrahams (Groupe Chez Gerard), Sally Clarke (Clarke's restaurant), Willie and Venetia Lebus (Bibendum Wine) and Jancis Robinson and Nicholas Lander of the *Financial Times* - were unanimous in choosing to award their 2002 travel bursary to Professor Corder from more than 20 strong applications from four continents.

His work had already indicated that different wines varied considerably in their ability to reduce damage to the lining of our arteries, with only red wines proving effective compared to white and rosé wines, and certain red wines being noticeably more potent in this respect. His next step was to analyse the wines drunk by Sardinians, particularly those in Nuoro.

His lab tests on samples of dozens of wines brought back from Sardinia show that they are indeed even more effective than almost all the other red wines he had previously tested - and wines made from grapes grown at higher altitudes tend to have even greater potential to prevent vascular changes associated with heart disease.

This echoed the results of Professor Corder's study published in *Nature* last year in which the most effective wine was from the high-altitude Mendoza region of Argentina. It is already known that UV light stimulates polyphenol synthesis in grapes. So the most likely explanation for these findings is that vines at higher altitudes are exposed to more intense UV light. 'Further studies are urgently needed to confirm this relationship,' says Professor Corder. He already has plans to test wines from the higher vineyards of the republic of Georgia which also has an unusually high proportion of centenarians.

Professor Corder points out the sober fact that the alcohol probably plays no part in this economically extremely significant potential discovery (given the prevalence of cardiovascular disease and the cost of treating it). Since the polyphenols and not the alcohol are implicated, a relevant grapeseed extract would almost certainly prove just as effective as wine. The Trustees of the Geoffrey Roberts Award are convinced however that Britain's pioneer importer of top California and Australian wines would have strongly advocated taking the prophylactic in liquid form.

The Geoffrey Roberts Award is an international food- and/or drink-related travel bursary given annually since 1996 in memory of Britain's pioneer New World wine importer. Applications are invited for the 2003 Award (closing date February 28, 2003). For more details and an application form, see [Geoffrey Roberts Award 2003](#).