

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

NIH-Sponsored Independent Consensus Panel Calls for Increased Availability of Methadone Treatment with Less Government Regulation

Opiate addiction is a medical disorder that can be effectively treated with methadone maintenance treatment (MTT), according to a statement issued by an independent consensus panel convened by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). At the November 17-19 National Consensus Development Conference on Effective Medical Treatment of Heroin Addiction, experts in the fields of neuroscience, epidemiology, heroin prevention, and heroin treatment presented and discussed the most current data on the treatment of heroin and other opiate addiction. Following the presentations, an independent consensus panel of experts weighed the scientific evidence and wrote a draft statement addressing the most important issues. The following were among the panel's findings:

- "Of the various treatments available, MMT [methadone maintenance treatment], combined with attention to medical, psychiatric, and socioeconomic issues, has the highest probability of being effective" (p. 3).
- While other methods of opiate treatment have been developed (such as LAAM and buprenorphine), "the use of these medications is at an early stage, and it may be some time before their usefulness has been adequately evaluated" (p. 7).
- Less than 20% (115,000) of the total opiate-addicted population of 600,000 are known to be in methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) programs.
- A major barrier to providing MMT is unnecessary Federal regulations that "limit the flexibility and responsiveness of the programs, require unproductive paperwork, and impose administrative and oversight costs greater than what are necessary for many patients" (p. 8).

The panel recommended, among other things, that unnecessary government regulation of MMT be eliminated. "DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] can more effectively, less coercively, and much more inexpensively discharge its statutory obligation to provide treatment guidance to MMTs, physicians, and staff by means of publications, seminars, Web sites, continuing medical education, and the like" (p. 8). A full copy of the consensus statement is available by calling 1-888-NIH-CONSENSUS or by visiting the NIH Consensus Development Program Web site at consensus.nih.gov.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the National Institutes of Health, *Effective Medical Treatment of Heroin Addiction*, Consensus Development Statement, WWW document; URL http://odp.od.nih.gov/consensus/statements/cdc/108/108_stmt.html (accessed 11/20/97).

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