

1995-2001 programme evaluation of the A-center for treatment of addicts consuming prohibited drugs at Maribor, Slovenia

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Summary

A study covering six years of treatment at our centre was dedicated to 570 patients addicted to prohibited (because illegal) drugs; those patients were enrolled in the period April 1995 - April 2001. Group A results are those for 284 addicts treated with methadone, while those for group B refer to the comprehensive treatment outcomes for all 570 addicts enrolled there in that period. Patients in group A had an average age of 26 years, and an average daily methadone dose of 80 mg, the following infections were recorded: (i) 21 patients (7.4%) had the hepatitis B virus, (ii) 105 (36.9%) had the hepatitis C virus, and (iii) no patients (0%) had the HIV virus. For 16 patients (5.6%) the results are unknown.

Analysis of the cause of death within this population shows approximately the same percentage (1.4%) for each of the four items: suicide, overdose, violent death and traffic accident. In April 2001 164 addicts were being treated in the methadone maintenance programme (VMP). In the larger group, B (n=570, all the addicts treated), the average age was 24 years, with percentages for infection with HBV, MCV and HIV below those for addicts in VMP. For 109 patients (19%), the results are unknown. Comorbidity was frequent; it involved 178 of these patients (37%): 115 patients were diagnosed as having personality problems (20%) and 58 (10%) as having endogenous psychic diseases.

Key words: Evaluation of treatment results - Methadone Maintenance Programme - Comorbidity of addicts - Extent of HBV, HCV HIV infection amongst addicts

Introduction

The Maribor centre is one of five A centres in the Republic of Slovenia, whose objective is to treat addiction to prohibited drugs. There are also a number of B centres, which are associated with these A centres. The institution that coordinates all the

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addiction treatment programmes in the republic is the detoxication centre in Ljubljana, which acts as part of the Clinical Department for Mental Health at UKC (University Clinical Centre).

The activities of our centre, which has been open since April 2, 1995, are as follows:

- addiction diagnostics
- preparation for treatment
- individual treatment
- collective treatment, taking place once a week
- a joint review of the therapists' work, held twice a month
- cooperation between the coordination bodies in Ljubljana and Maribor
- assistance with the psycho-social rehabilitation of addicts
- assistance given to the B centres in Murska Sobota
- medical services to addicts for the day centres known as "Maribor - Healthy Town"
- substitution and maintenance methadone programme
- complete management of the laboratory diagnostics of addicts
- vaccinations of addicts against hepatitis A and B
- permanent education
- permanent presence in the public media of our town
- lecture programmes in schools and participation at round tables
- passive and active participation at international congresses
- preventive work with young people (in Croatia and in Italy).

A brief presentation of the rules of the Substitution and Maintenance Methadone Programme (VMP) in Slovenia.

This programme is reserved for patients under 18 who have failed to complete two or three (documented) treatments of addiction and have proved to have taken hard drugs (heroin) intravenously for a period of at least a year.

Other criteria for admission include several laboratory findings (e.g. testing positive to opiates), and auto- and hetero-anamneses. Pregnant addicts, who are unable to live without illegal drugs, are also entitled to this programme, as well as addicts infected by the HIV virus – fortunately, no addicts have tested positive in Slovenia, so far. Methadone is distributed every day from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., dissolved in fruit juice, which the addicts have to drink in the dispensary in the presence of our medical staff. In special cases (stable, settled and employed clients) exceptions are permitted.

Group work takes place in the afternoons; each of four groups is led by one therapist. Two of them comprise two co-therapists. At the moment all the group work, including that involving the therapists, is supervised and/or peervised by the centre head. Over the past four years 250 addicts have been vaccinated against hepatitis A or B (3x). In the six years following the opening of our centre (April 1995 to April 2001) 570 addicts were treated there. If it is borne in mind that only 10 to 15% of these

patients received medical treatment, it is easy to form an epidemiologic picture of the addiction to prohibited drugs in Maribor, which has a population of about 200,000 inhabitants.

In those six years 284 addicts attended the methadone programme; of these, 164 were still receiving treatment in April 2001. 286 addicts are included in our full range of programmes – in the detoxication centres, in the communities of Don Pierino, Patriarhe and Syanon, in the hospital or at the day centre known as “Maribor - Healthy Town”. The trends for initial examinations still show no increase in number of applications. The programme at our centre is a low-threshold one, which means that we try to offer help to every addict who asks for it. Of course, many addicts are unable to fulfil even the minimum requirements, so there is a considerable drop-out rate from the programme.

A higher threshold level for the work in the centre is attained by the meetings with groups of parents and addicts. In this case the results are better and more stimulating than with individual methadone treatment.

Report

GROUP A: This comprises 284 addicts, who in the period April 1995 - April 2001 were treated in the methadone maintenance programme (VMP). In April 2001 164 of these were still being treated in VMP. The daily dose of methadone was 80 mg, the average age was 26 years and the ratio between male and female patients was 2.6/1 (208/76). 21 patients (7.4%) were infected with HBV, 105 (36.9%) were infected with HCV and none were infected with HIV. The percentage of unknown results is 5.6% (16 patients).

The review of cause of death gives the following outcome: 3 deaths from suicide, 4 from an overdose, 2 from a traffic accident, 2 from an illness and in 4 cases addicts were the victims of violent acts. 53 patients (about 10%) were prosecuted and/or punished. Comorbidity was diagnosed for 107 addicts (38%), 63 of whom had personality problems (22%), while 45 suffered from psychotic diseases (16%).

GROUP B: In this group the results for all the patients treated at the centre were considered globally (for the period April 1995 - April 2001), so that this group comprised not only VMP but also the dispensary approach, the pre- and post-hospital treatment, psycho-social rehabilitation, and so on. The average age was 24 years, and the ratio between male and female patients was 2.9/1 (427/143).

None of the group were infected with HIV; 21 (3.7%) were infected with HBC and 116 (20.3%) were infected with HCV. The percentage of unknown results (many treated patients were not willing to take all the required tests) was 19% (109 patients). In the 6-year period, 24 people died (4.2%). Of these, 5 (less than 1% of group B) committed suicide, 10 (1.7%) had taken an overdose, 5 were murdered and 4 were victims of traffic accidents (2%) or an illness (2%). Comorbidity was diagnosed for 178 addicts (31%),

of whom 115 had personality problems (20%) and 58 (10%) endogenous psychosis.

The results of the therapeutic treatment are as follows:

164 addicts (28%) were retained in VMP, 47 (8.2%) went to communities, and 50 (8.8%) were treated in hospital. In spite of receiving all kinds of help, about 45% (256) continued to consume prohibited psychoactive substances (PAS), whereas 10% (57 patients) became PAS-free.

Comment

In this section the data for 1997 will be compared with those presented so far (for 2001). The results of 6 years of work with addicts on prohibited PAS in Maribor show that the number of patients on the methadone maintenance programme is rising, as is the total number of all addicts treated. Five years ago (1997) the ratio between male and female patients was 3.4/1, whereas it was 2.9/1 in 2001. In addition, the average age of addicts has fallen from 24.8 to 24 years.

By comparison with 1997, the percentage of those infected with HCV was almost 13% lower in 2001, while the percentage of HBV infection was unchanged. The results show the effectiveness of low-threshold programmes (condomats, needle-exchange programmes and health prevention), besides, of course, the importance of keeping the addict population well-informed and aware of the dangers of these infections.

One encouraging fact is that none of the addicts on prohibited drugs (PAS) tested positive to HIV infection. In 1997 the percentage of unknown results was 26%; in 2001 it was “only” 19%.

In 1997 the average dose of methadone was 65 mg, in 2001 it was 80 mg. The drop-out from VMP was smaller. When comparing the number of those dying in the years between 1997 and 2001 a significant increase can be noticed, from 3.7 to 4.3%. The increase is mainly the result of violent behaviour and overdoses.

The problem of comorbidity has not changed significantly. In both the two periods being compared, it amounted to approximately one third of all the patients being treated.

Again, the percentages for therapeutic successes and failures were similar. In both periods one third to one quarter of the addicts were retained, about 10% go to communities and a similar percentage become drug-free. 45% continue to consume prohibited PAS.

In working with addicts supporting therapy is important, as well as the education of addicts and their relations or partners, group work with them and psychosocial support.

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