

Assessment of Ayurveda treatment for heroin dependence

National Dangerous Drugs Control Board (NDDCB) carried out an assessment of the ayurveda (indigenous) treatment for heroin dependence at Bandaranaike Memorial Ayurveda Research Institute (BMARI), Navinna in 2001. The objectives of the assessment were to explore and

document the treatment process, to assess the effectiveness of it, and to make recommendations to increase its efficacy.

The assessment was an exploratory study to appraise the effectiveness of the BMARI's treatment process for heroin users. It was conducted by interviewing a non-probable sample of 50 heroin users treated at the BMARI and treatment personnel, making observations about the treatment process, and analysis of urine samples for opiates of the persons treated for heroin use by Enzyme Multiplied Immunoassay Technique (EMIT). Due to the sample size and research design, the findings of the assessment cannot be extrapolated to other drug treatment populations.

Among the persons treated, 14% had given up heroin use and 10% had refrained for its use between 1 and 3 years, and 30% was able to refuse heroin when offered. Most persons treated for heroin use at BMARI came from locations closer to it. Of the six persons tested for opiates in urine, one (16%) was negative for heroin after two and half months of discharge from the treatment. Seventy per cent of the persons treated were able to maintain good family relationships in spite of their drug use.

Insufficient emphasis on treating the mental craving for drugs, inadequate counselling provided for heroin users; mainly due to no training on counselling among treatment personnel, lack of follow-up after discharge, not enough motivation to go through treatment and self confidence to change their lifestyles as well as little interests outside drug use by heroin users, and absence of an effective relapse prevention plan were the major drawbacks of the BMARI's treatment programme.

Treatment for heroin dependence at BMARI with ayurveda and acupuncture treatment is a new indigenous treatment options for heroin users, which could be perfected by improving on the drawbacks.