



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Sunday, March 4, 1973

GOOD RESPONSE TO METHADONE TREATMENT SCHEMES

Over 140 Addicts Now Receiving Daily Doses

Since the two methadone maintenance pilot schemes started three months ago, there has been an encouraging response from drug addicts, according to officials conducting the studies.

One scheme is operated by the Medical and Health Department on Hong Kong Island and the other is run by the Discharged Prisoners Aid Society in Kowloon.

Up to now, a total of 143 drug addicts have volunteered for and completed treatment and are receiving daily doses of methadone.

The programmes involve the controlled use of methadone to help drug addicts give up heroin, thus allowing them to return to normal social, family and work life.

As the two schemes are study programmes, only male addicts are admitted. Women addicts are not included because their numbers are relatively small in proportion to male addicts. Also the effects of methadone on women, particularly those who are pregnant, are not known for certain.

Studies of the effect of methadone on pregnant women have been carried out in different countries but the results of methadone on the unborn fetus are still inconclusive and opinions differ.

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While other countries, like Canada and the United States, already had methadone maintenance programmes for heroin addicts, there was none in Hong Kong. The two pilot schemes then are being conducted to study if it will prove useful or helpful in treating heroin addicts here.

Methadone is a synthetic drug discovered during the Second World War. Its advantages over heroin are that it does not produce the euphoric feeling experienced from heroin, blocks the craving for heroin and has a longer lasting effect.

Also methadone use does not lead to tolerance so it is not necessary to increase the dosage to maintain the same effect.

Steady Employment

A drug addict, after undergoing methadone treatment, will have a chance, with social and rehabilitative counselling, to obtain steady employment since he would not need to take heroin every four or five hours. It follows from this that he can then readjust himself to live a normal life, having only to call once a day at any convenient time for his methadone.

There is also the possibility that once on methadone, a patient may find he no longer needs to take a dosage daily and in this way, with determination, may even give it up altogether in the long run.

Unlike some overseas programmes, participants in the Hong Kong programmes are not given methadone to take home. They have to call daily at the centre of treatment for their dosage. Urine screening is carried out to see if they have reverted to heroin.

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After admission addicts are given a maintenance dose and this is adjusted to a stabilising level on discharge.

The experimental scheme run by the Medical and Health Department operates from the former mental hospital premises in western district. It is a self-contained unit where patients are hospitalised, usually for about 10 days, and then checked out to return daily for their methadone.

The average age and years of addiction of addicts who have been treated so far are 30 years and 10 years respectively.

"From the response it would appear that the scheme is proving popular with those addicts who really want to get rid of their heroin addiction," said a spokesman.

Voluntary Participation

"Of course, there are a few who have tried but did not have the courage and determination to see it through."

The unit now has 10 in hospital and a list of 100 waiting to be admitted into the scheme.

Participation is entirely voluntary and treatment is free. During the three-year study, the unit expects to treat 550 addicts. The cost to government will be \$2.1 million.

The scheme in Kowloon operates on a smaller scale and its study will be confined to 100 addicts. The centre is in the Tung Tau Resettlement estate and the medical unit in a nearby hospital.

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So far D.P.A.S. has treated 25 addicts and has eight under hospitalisation. Another eleven are being processed. The average age and years of addiction of their patients are more or less similar to those of the Hong Kong scheme.

Treatment is again free and being a voluntary agency. A sum of \$521,350 has been allocated from the Lotteries Fund for the study which will also be conducted over three years.

A medical spokesman for the Society said that it was too early to assess whether methadone would be useful in treating heroin addicts here.

Another voluntary agency, the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts (SARDA) is also using methadone to relieve withdrawal symptoms during hospitalisation.

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COMPUTER FOR ROYAL OBSERVATORY

For More Accurate Weather Forecasts

The Royal Observatory will soon install a new computer which will assist in the production of weather forecasts.

When fully operational, it will make Hong Kong the second place in the Far East, next to Japan, to use computer techniques in weather forecasting.

The computer will process and analyse all incoming communication circuits and available meteorological data quickly, so that more accurate and timely forecasts can be prepared at more frequent intervals.

It should prove particularly useful in preparing tropical cyclone and severe rainstorm warnings quickly, so as to minimise damage to property, loss of lives and interruption to economic activities.

The computer will also be able to analyse weather information over a much wider area and higher altitude, thereby increasing the reliability of weather forecasts for aviation and marine purposes.

It can also be used to prepare special analyses of meteorological data and forecasts which are essential for the planning of major development projects such as the extension of the airport runway, the design of the High Island Water Scheme and the construction of the rapid transit system.

At present, all these are done manually by using relatively simple techniques and it takes many man-hours to analyse all available information and prepare a forecast.

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With the help of the computer, a large amount of time will be saved and this will enable the Royal Observatory to open new venues in developing, testing and improving forecasting techniques as well as passing on more weather information, particularly during typhoons, to neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia.

An order for the computer had already been placed and it is expected that part of it will be installed this year for preliminary investigations and the complete installation will become operational in early 1974.

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