
UNIT 6

Traditional medicine and traditional healers

Learning objectives

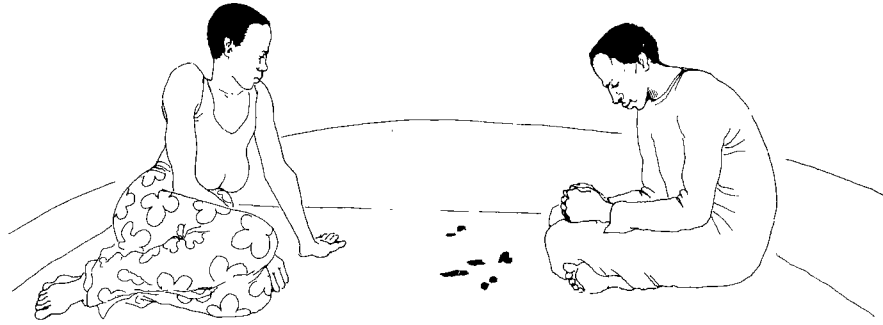
After studying this unit, you should be able to:

1. Recognize the various kinds of traditional practitioner with whom you may need to work.
 2. Build cooperation with traditional practitioners.
 3. Choose traditional practitioners to work with you.
 4. Discourage quacks and dangerous traditional practices.
 5. Encourage the use of traditional treatment of the mentally ill when it is helpful and discourage it when it is harmful or dangerous.
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Most refugees and displaced populations come from areas where the majority of people still use traditional medicine and only a few have access to scientific medical care. Most refugees have never had a medical examination or taken modern medical drugs. They are often afraid of being treated in a way they are not accustomed to. Such people often misunderstand Western medical care. For example, when a child who has been vaccinated too late against measles actually gets measles and dies of the disease, some people may think that the death has been caused by the vaccine. If so, they will strongly oppose any further vaccination.

Many people feel safer if they are treated by their traditional healers in a way they are used to than if they go to hospital. However, although some diseases can be treated in a traditional way, others can be cured only by scientific medicine. It is not wise to fight against traditional healers because most people trust them and seek their advice or care. The best way to help people is to cooperate with traditional healers rather than make them your enemies. The healers will trust you if you trust them. Also, the people you want to help will trust you more if their healers trust you. They will be happier to accept you if you cooperate with their traditional healers.

If you work closely with traditional healers, you will see that they are able to treat many problems and illnesses. They can often relieve physical or mental



Traditional healers can often relieve physical and mental suffering

suffering, but they cannot deal with all problems. Sometimes scientific medicine can help when they cannot. Work together to find the best way to help people.

Remember that refugees and displaced people will usually go back to their homes eventually. When they do, they may no longer be able to benefit from scientific medicine. They may have to rely on traditional healers in the future.

The different kinds of traditional practitioner

Each society has different kinds of traditional healer. Generally there are six kinds, in addition to traditional birth attendants who deliver babies and advise on the care of mother and child. The six general types of traditional healer are described here although some may use methods from more than one of the categories.

- Some traditional healers first listen to people's complaints and then ask questions about their symptoms. Then they prescribe a medication made from plants or other substances or give other kinds of physical treatment. Although such healers do not make a physical examination, they work in a similar way to medical doctors. They are useful to work with.
- Other traditional healers seek the nature of the illness and its cure by meditating or going into a trance in order to get advice from a god or spirit. They claim that their knowledge comes from a divinity. The treatment may be a certain kind of plant, to be collected under certain circumstances. It could also be an offering to a particular spirit or god, or a special diet. These healers often predict how the illness will progress and what will happen to the sick person. It may not be easy to work with these healers because they have no obvious place in a modern health team, but you can try. In any case, stay on good terms with them and do not stop people from seeking their help.

- In some cultures, people believe that each person has a fixed number of souls. These souls may leave the body and wander around, especially at night when people dream. A soul may get lost and be unable to find its way back, and this is why a person becomes sick. A person with special powers, called a “shaman” in some cultures, will try to find the soul and return it to the body of the sick person. The shaman often goes into a state of trance. The ritual may last for several hours or days. Usually, shamans practise in the house of the person who has sought their help or in their own premises. They may also be allowed to practise in the hospital wards. This can be a good thing because it may prevent people from leaving the hospital to seek their help.
- Some traditional healers use magic as a cure because they believe that illnesses have supernatural origins. They think that illnesses are caused by spirits that have been offended and are seeking revenge, or by black magic sent by other people. Some people believe that a spirit can be introduced by black magic into another person’s body. They believe that this spirit can cause physical or mental problems. Healers who use magic make their diagnoses in many different ways. Depending on the person seeking help and the culture, healers use very different rituals to counteract black magic. Some of the rituals may be useful for treating psychological suffering. You may be able to work with these healers. They can help solve many psychological problems and can treat some mental disorders.
- People who feel sick or uncomfortable in body or mind may consult fortune-tellers. Fortune-tellers give advice and usually say how long it will take for the person to get better. This may help people to keep up hope when life is hard but it may also make things worse if people are told they will never recover. Fortune-tellers use different ways of finding out about what is happening and what is going to happen. Sometimes they may even go into a trance to do this.

You may find it hard to work with fortune-tellers because it is difficult to know what they will say to people, but on the whole they probably do no harm. People believe what they want or need to believe. You can try to work with them, although this may be frustrating. Never stop people consulting them.

- Some traditional practitioners — men and women — and traditional birth attendants specialize in traditional massage. Traditional massage usually focuses on arteries, veins, nerves, joints and other specific parts of the body rather than on the muscles. The healers use their fingers and thumbs, but also sometimes their feet, and they press hard. This may be useful for the relief of pain and tension but the effects may not last long.

Experts in massage can be very useful in treating headache or migraine and sometimes body pain. Many people complain of pain in some part of the

body even though there is no physical basis for the pain. They are suffering in their mind but feel pain in their body. They often feel better after traditional massage. (See Unit 1 for more explanation of physical pain as a result of social or emotional difficulties.)

How to build cooperation with traditional practitioners

- *Show traditional healers that you respect them.* Traditional healers are respected by their own people. If you do not respect them, they will feel offended and you cannot expect their full cooperation. If the people see that you respect their healers, they will understand that you care about fitting into their society. This way you will gain respect and credibility.

Do not try to prove that scientific medicine is better than traditional medicine. Traditional and scientific medicine complement each other; they do not compete against each other. Sometimes one gives better results than the other. Sometimes the results are the same. In some cases it is useful to use both at the same time. Many people feel much better when they see that nothing is neglected in trying to make them well again.

You will probably find it difficult to persuade the traditional healers and the people who use scientific medicine to use both types of medicine at the same time. They will say that they fear that one will have a bad effect on the other. Tell them that it is better to try than to be afraid for no proven reason.

- *Do not challenge traditional healers.* When you first meet them, many traditional healers will tell you that they can treat all kinds of diseases, especially some diseases for which there is no known cure. Do not argue with them. Do not tell them that this is not possible or that they are lying. You would offend them and perhaps force them into taking risks to prove the value of their treatment. Listen to them. If you have the right attitude they will stop speaking like this when they know you better.
- *Be humble and tolerant.* If you are trained in scientific medicine, admit that there are things it cannot do. It cannot cure all diseases. Traditional healers will find it easier to recognize what they can and cannot do, without being afraid of losing face, if you first admit that scientific medicine sometimes cannot help. Since both types of medicine have their good points, cooperation is wise.
- *Know the difference between genuine traditional healers and quacks.* "Quacks" are unscrupulous people who may know something about traditional healing but are not traditional healers. They often do spectacular but controversial things in order to become famous and make money. They can be very harmful to the people who seek their help and they give traditional healing a bad name. Be careful to work with genuine traditional

healers and not with quacks. Support the genuine healers and tell the authorities about the quacks if they are putting the health of the people they treat in danger.

How to choose traditional healers to work with you

Doctors, nurses and missionaries have often opposed traditional healers and tried to stop their practices. Because of this, people in the refugee community may tell you that there are no traditional healers among them. They want to protect their healers. The healers also may be afraid to talk to you. Reassure them that you do not wish to stop them working among their people.

- Explain to the community leaders and the people why you wish to cooperate with the traditional healers. Tell them what your intentions are. Say that you want to help the healers so that they can use their skills for treating people. Say that you think that both traditional and scientific medicine are good and can get along well together.
- Ask to meet several healers, not just one. Tell them about your plans and how you would like to work with them. Listen to their ideas. Always let them see that you believe their work is important and that you respect them.
- Do not work with only one healer. Always have several work with you. The risk in working with only one is that he or she may be a quack who is interested only in power and fame. Even a healer who is genuine may become too proud and take risks to get more glory. Also the other healers will probably become jealous and may try to give your chosen healer a bad reputation among the people.

Several healers working together as a group can watch each other's activities. If one of them tries to do things that may harm the group's reputation, the others will probably prevent it.

- Always insist that the healers fulfil their role responsibly. This means not only caring for people in the best way. The healers must also give others — especially doctors and nurses — a good image of their medicine and of themselves. Because of this they should not take risks in treating people who are very sick or dangerously ill. Explain to the healers that it is better to send people who are extremely ill to the medical doctors if possible. Say that if a person dies in a hospital people will think that the death resulted from the illness. But if the person was treated by traditional healers, medical doctors may say that the healers caused the death. Stress that this would harm their reputation.

How to deal with quacks and dangerous traditional practices

If you notice that a healer is doing dangerous things that could cause harm, try first to find out whether these are genuine traditional practices or just a personal method used by a quack. Ask other healers what they think of these practices. Do they use them themselves? If not, why do they not use them? Ask them also whether these practices are widely used by other healers. This will help you to know whether these practices are just the work of a quack or whether they are common features of traditional healing.

Quacks

Genuine traditional healers will not defend or support quacks, especially if you stress that quacks damage the reputation of all good healers and of traditional medicine. Decide with them what can be done to oblige the quacks to stop their bad and dangerous practices. The good healers may not know what to do but at least they will understand that you want to protect them and their medicine by opposing the quacks.

Speak about the problem with the camp's leaders and authorities. You may find that even the leaders are worried about taking action although they may understand that quacks do dangerous things that should be stopped. People are often afraid of quacks because they claim to have magic powers. They do not want to turn the quacks into their enemies. They are afraid that the quacks will seek revenge and make them become sick or even die.

Tell officials from the organizations in charge of protecting the refugees or the displaced populations (UNHCR or the International Committee of the Red Cross, for example). They should do what is necessary if people's safety is at risk.

Controversial or dangerous traditional practices

Sometimes a treatment that is widely practised by healers, and not only by quacks, may be controversial or dangerous. Discuss such treatments with senior health workers or camp administrators if possible. Examples of treatments that could be dangerous are burning or cutting the skin, and wrapping babies with a high fever in warm blankets and extra clothes.

Another thing to remember about traditional healing is its cost. People who go to healers may be desperate for help, either for themselves or for a member of their family. They may be prepared to pay almost anything for help. Some healers, and especially quacks, may take advantage of this and demand large amounts of money for their services. Before you agree to work with a traditional healer, get some idea of how much they charge their clients.

Traditional medicine and the mentally ill

Some kinds of mental illness are very obvious. People with these illnesses may be agitated, afraid, talk nonsense or hear voices that do not exist. They may laugh and sing a lot and sleep very little.

Sometimes the mental illness is depression. Persons who are depressed are very sad, think that they have no value, have no hope and may want to kill themselves. These symptoms sometimes disappear without treatment within a few months. They may also continue for much longer and there is always a risk that a depressed person may commit suicide. Even after long periods of recovery, people may become depressed again. This is described in more detail in Unit 4, page 42.

It is doubtful whether persons such as these — with psychoses like schizophrenia or severe depression — can be cured by traditional healers. However, if healers are good people who treat those who seek their help kindly and humanely, there is no reason to worry. Let them try. They may be able to help those who come to them, even if they cannot cure them. After all, some mental illnesses go away without any treatment. Traditional healers may have a positive effect on a person's mental health. Still, for most people with mental illness, it is best to treat them with medical drugs as well as giving them traditional treatment. People treated by both healers and scientific medicine are more likely to make a good recovery than people who receive only the medical drugs. Remember to check carefully that the traditional treatment is acceptable and does not make people suffer or frighten them.

Most traditional healers admit that they cannot treat people with mental illnesses but some claim that they can. Be careful. It is most likely that the healers who claim this are honest and good people who believe that they have healed people who recovered by themselves. But they could also be quacks who use dangerous treatments.

Traditional treatment for the mentally ill

Physical treatment

Physical treatment usually consists of frightening and painful experiences. People may be severely beaten, burned in various places all over the body or forced to drink disgusting things. They may be badly frightened because they are made to think they will die or be killed.

The purpose of this kind of traditional treatment is to produce a shock which is supposed to bring the person back to reality. But, in fact, the person may get worse. Sometimes a person may seem to get better but the improvement does not last. Severe pain can reduce psychological suffering for a short time but it does not remove it. Those who use these methods claim success by showing temporary improvement but the person gets worse afterwards.

It is important to remember:

- Such methods are not treatment. They are forms of torture inflicted on people who are mentally ill.
- These methods cannot cure the mentally ill. Their condition is likely to become worse.
- These methods are not ethical. No one has the right to impose needless suffering on people who cannot defend themselves.
- Report use of these methods to the authorities and the organizations responsible for refugees and displaced populations. They should act to stop these practices.

Magic healing methods

Magic cures are performed through rituals that are different in each culture. In some places only the healer and the person who is mentally ill, and possibly the family, are involved in the rituals. In other places a large crowd may take part.

Magical treatment takes different forms. Special offerings might be made to a spirit that is thought to be seeking revenge because the sick person has offended it. Or an evil spirit that is thought to have possessed the person through black magic may be driven out. In some cultures a lost soul may be searched for.

The religious beliefs of some relief workers prevent them from accepting magical practices that they believe are witchcraft and the worshipping of false gods. These workers may oppose magic healing methods. Magic cures usually do not harm and may help people. There is no medical reason to oppose them.

These cures can be particularly helpful if the healers ask the spirit that is thought to possess a person to speak. It is believed that the spirit speaks through the mouth of the person. In this way problems can be spoken about easily. Normally the person would feel too ashamed to speak in this way of personal matters. Since it is thought that it is the spirit and not the person who is speaking, things can be said more easily. This can have a healing effect.

Sometimes persons who claim magical powers sprinkle special "lustral" water on people who are ill. Lustral water is prepared by reciting prayers, mantras or magic formulae over a container full of water. Often people treated with lustral water claim that they feel more relaxed and more comfortable and that their mind is clearer. Some say that they suffer less pain after this treatment. Healers may also blow on the head or on other parts of the body while saying prayers or magic words. This can also help some people calm down and feel less anxious.

Many other magic healing methods are medically acceptable if they are not associated with violent or painful practices.

Counselling

Traditional healers are usually old and wise and know how to listen and talk to people. They may give valuable advice, make useful comments or give explanations. This can reduce or take away people's guilt, worries and other painful feelings, such as the feelings we experience after a death or after other hurtful events.

Sometimes people find themselves in a very confusing and puzzling situation, such as during family conflicts. Healers can help people understand and sort out these situations. People trust healers and confide in them, so they find it easier to speak to healers and respect their advice.

Do not hesitate to involve traditional healers in counselling people who need to understand more clearly what their problems are. You may be able to involve some healers in group support work with people who have problems. It is often good to have both male and female traditional practitioners. You can involve traditional birth attendants as well as healers. Let each of them speak and listen. Say what you want to say, but do not take the leading role. Do not try to speed things up. People may need time to express their real problems.

Medication

Traditional healers prepare remedies for many kinds of physical complaint, such as headache, dizziness, fatigue, poor appetite and pain. These remedies can help people with these complaints. The complaints may be due to a physical illness but often they may have a psychological origin.

Some powerful medical drugs that are used for severe physical illnesses are made from substances that were first discovered in plants used by traditional healers. Examples are quinine (for malaria), digitalis (for heart failure), aspirin and rauwolfia (for high blood pressure, and for calming and sedating people).

Are there traditional remedies for severe mental illnesses? Are there plants that can cure people who hear voices, or who have delusions or speak nonsense? The answer is probably no.

Certain substances extracted from plants, such as mescaline, affect the mind. Healthy people who take these substances have hallucinations (they hear and see things that do not exist) and may become very anxious. These substances are dangerous and must not be used to treat the mentally ill.

Opium poppies and coca are plants with very powerful effects on severe pain and tiredness but they should not be used to treat mental illnesses. They can be

dangerous because people quickly become dependent on them and cannot stop taking them.

Be careful if some healers say that they have plants to treat mental illness. Plants that act strongly on the mind are dangerous and may do more harm than good. Sometimes healers use cannabis (also called marijuana, hashish or ganja) but it should not be used as a medication. Many countries prohibit its use by law.

If a traditional healer claims to have a remedy for mental illness, ask what happens after the patient has taken this medicine. Ask what else the healer will do while the person is under the influence of the drug. Has anyone died during this treatment? Treatments that could put someone's life in danger or make people suffer are not acceptable.

Traditional remedies can be helpful and give good results, but be very careful with traditional remedies that are claimed to cure mental illness. They are probably useless and could be dangerous. Ask the advice of a scientifically trained medical doctor before you agree to healers using these remedies. If some families insist that remedies like this should be used, suggest that the treatment be supervised by a qualified health worker.

Complementary approaches

Traditional practitioners can provide useful services in health care, including mental health care. Acknowledge and praise their useful and safe skills, but do not believe that they can deal with all health problems. Like medical doctors, they cannot do everything. They can, however, help and heal many people with psychological problems and in painful and complicated circumstances.

It is less likely that traditional healers have the means of treating severe mental conditions, whereas medical doctors do have effective drugs.

The traditional and scientific approaches complement each other. Used together in the treatment of mentally ill refugees, they give better results than if just one approach is used.

Establish with healers a relationship based on mutual esteem, trust, respect and understanding. Support their practice and work with them as closely as possible. Remember, however, that quacks can do great harm, especially to those with severe mental disorders who cannot defend themselves. Quacks are not genuine traditional healers and they discredit traditional medicine.

Notes for camp administrators

Traditional medical practices are not dangerous just because they may seem odd, unfamiliar or shocking to the outsider. Before deciding that a traditional

practice is dangerous, carefully observe what the healers are doing. Judge what they do from two standpoints — medical and ethical (moral).

Here are two examples of traditional practices. The first concerns superficial burns used as a treatment. The second is the habit of wrapping babies with high fever in warm clothes and blankets.

Example 1: Superficial burns

Some healers may make small superficial burns on certain parts of the body. Sometimes they do this together with acupuncture and call it “moxibustion”, but sometimes it has no relation to Chinese medicine.

To decide whether this kind of treatment is acceptable, consider the following:

- How many burns are made, how big are they and where are they made? Are they superficial or deep? A few surface burns on parts of the body normally covered by clothes may be acceptable. Many deep burns, all over the body, are not acceptable. They are torture rather than treatment.
- What substances do the healers put on the burns? If it is earth or dung or any other dirty substance, it will cause infection and possibly death from tetanus. This is not acceptable, even on superficial burns.
- Is the treatment freely accepted by the person? In some societies, people do not mind scars. In other societies, scars are thought of as a bad thing. This is why burns on the face, neck or hands are probably bad and should be discouraged.

If you find a treatment not acceptable, you should have good reasons. Explain these reasons to the healers. Insist that they need to protect their reputation. They should never do anything that may give them a bad name.

Example 2: High fever and the risk of convulsions

When a baby has a high fever there is a risk that it will have convulsions. Severe convulsions or convulsions that happen again and again may seriously damage the brain. At the first convulsion, or preferably as soon as the baby's temperature rises above 39°C, it is essential to cool the baby's body quickly. This can be done by bathing the baby in cold water and then placing it naked in a cool place or in a place where there is plenty of air. Medical doctors tell parents to do this because they know that the brain can be severely damaged during convulsions. Traditionally, however, people often do the opposite. They cover the baby with warm clothes and blankets. This dangerous tradition is very hard to stop.

Tell the healers that the baby may die from the disease that causes the fever whether the baby is covered or not covered and whether the fever is kept high

or brought down. Ask the healers whether they have noticed that babies with high fever often have convulsions. They will tell you that they have. Ask them how they explain this. Then tell them how you explain it — by the effect of the temperature on the baby's brain. This does not happen when children are older because their brain is stronger. Ask them whether they have noticed that children who had severe convulsions when they were babies sometimes are normal afterwards but often are not normal. These children may not be bright or intelligent and may still have seizures.

Ask the healers how they explain this. Then tell them how you explain it — that it is because the baby's brain has been damaged during the convulsions. This is why we must try to prevent babies from having convulsions when their temperature is high.

Remember

- People do not change their habits or beliefs from one day to the next.
 - Do not blame people for their traditions. They follow tradition because they believe it is right for their children, not because they are stupid or stubborn.
 - People are more likely to follow your advice when they trust you. That is why it is important to build up a good relationship with them.
 - Do not be surprised if people trust their traditional healers more than they trust you. Even if the healers are wrong to advise that a baby with high fever should be covered and you are right to advise the opposite, families are more likely to trust the healers than to trust you. That is why you need to get the healers on your side.
 - Do not openly oppose the healers, even if they ask people to do something which you know is harmful. Stay calm and polite. Discuss with them, listen to their reasons and explain to them why medical doctors have a different opinion.
 - The healers will trust you if you trust them. They will respect your opinion if you respect them. If you can convince them that what you suggest is right, they will be able to persuade the families to follow your advice.
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UNIT 7

Alcohol and other drug problems

Learning objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

1. Explain to key members of the refugee group, and to other relief workers, the risks of alcohol and other drug problems that refugees face.
 2. Organize the refugee community to watch out constantly for this kind of problem in order to prevent or counter it.
 3. Recognize people who already have problems related to alcohol and other drugs, or who are at high risk of developing such problems.
 4. Arrange for suitable help for these people. Whenever possible this help should come from within the refugee community itself.
 5. Establish links with health care services for referral of people who have taken a dangerous amount of alcohol or drugs. You should also be able to refer people with other complications that cannot be dealt with within the refugee community.
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Alcohol and other drug problems are common in many societies. They may be lessened when people become refugees but they may also become worse.

There are several reasons for an increase in the risk of serious alcohol and other drug problems among refugees. Once the refugees themselves, as well as the authorities, are aware of why such risks occur, much can be done to prevent them and to help those who are affected.

How alcohol and other drug problems can occur

People who use alcohol or other drugs risk developing many problems. These include health, family and personal problems. As people use these substances more, they are more at risk. Some of the people you care for may have had these problems before they became refugees.

When people who use a lot of alcohol or drugs (heavy users) become refugees they may reduce or stop their use in the upset and confusion of their flight. But

they are at serious risk of even more severe problems if nothing is done to prevent alcohol and drugs from becoming available to them. Those who used a lot before becoming refugees are most at risk once they have settled in the new community. A refugee community also has a potentially large number of new users, who could quickly become heavy users.

Some refugees may begin to use alcohol or other drugs as a way to avoid facing their real problems. Others may have a lot of time with nothing useful to do. The refugee may feel, "I don't care about the future or what happens to me or to other people." When families and society stop controlling people's behaviour in the normal way, young people in particular may start taking alcohol or drugs.

For alcohol and other drug problems to appear, suppliers must find a market among the refugees. If the refugees can pay for drugs, the drugs will soon be supplied. Suppliers of drugs (drug dealers) can easily take advantage of refugees and use them for their own purposes. They may use the refugees for illegal activities and pay them with alcohol or other drugs. They may look for ways of supplying the refugees without the knowledge of the authorities.

Refugees risk a lot by taking alcohol or other drugs regularly. These substances can seriously damage health, and when people are living in poor conditions the damage to health is even greater. When refugees spend the small amount of money they have on drugs, they make life even more difficult for others. Social problems caused by drug use can affect not only the family but also the refugee community as a whole.

If refugees use alcohol and other drugs regularly, they will make little effort to improve their living conditions. This affects all the refugees. Even if a few people begin to drink a lot or take other drugs, it affects the confidence and discipline of the whole community.

What you can do

Help the refugees to organize themselves to prevent a demand for alcohol and drugs within their community. It is also important to prevent outsiders from supplying the refugees with drugs.

Helping the community

You may need to tell the leaders of the refugee community about the risk of people starting to use alcohol or other drugs. Warn them that outsiders may try to create a demand for alcohol and other drugs.

Community leaders should understand that refugees are an easy target for drug dealers. This is especially true if the refugees are not well organized as a community and have little or no hope of returning to a normal social life again.

Encourage the community leaders to watch out for problems. Ask if they think that the use of alcohol and other drugs has already begun or is increasing. Do they think these problems could soon appear? If so, they could ask individual refugees or groups for help in preventing the problems before they begin. They could try to get the whole refugee community to act to prevent drug and alcohol use. They may be able to find out whether outsiders are trying to create a market. They could find out who these outsiders are and where they come from. Then they could decide on the best way to stop them.

Once the refugees and their leaders are aware of the risk, continue to discuss with them how to persuade people not to use drugs. Make everyone aware of how harmful the drug trade is. Persuade the refugees to take action to protect each other from starting or continuing to take drugs. Make it difficult for outsiders to profit from the conditions in which the refugees are living.

To prevent drug problems, everything should be done to improve and keep up the general welfare and morale of the refugees. All refugees should feel useful and should want to do their best for one another and for the whole community. If they have useful things to do and have some hope for the future, they will be less likely to take drugs. Warn the whole community that refugees who take drugs have more problems than people living in normal communities who take drugs.

Remember

- Stress the possible effects of drug use on the whole community.
- Help the community to understand the risks of alcohol and other drugs.
- Encourage the community always to keep watch for the beginnings of drug use.
- Arrange from time to time for the refugee community to commit itself publicly to stopping the use of alcohol and other drugs. The refugees must also commit themselves to stopping the illicit production and trade of alcohol and other drugs.
- Involve the whole community in group activities to help each other while they wait for a more permanent solution to their problem.
- Arrange for the refugees to discuss how they should organize themselves to prevent alcohol and other drugs from being used in their community.
- Always try to raise and maintain the refugees' hope.

By preventing the problems linked with the use of alcohol and other drugs you can prevent further harm to the refugees. Help them to understand this. They can then organize themselves to protect one another and the whole community from these problems.



Some refugees will need special attention because of their alcohol use

Helping individuals

Some individual refugees will need special attention and help.

- Ask who uses alcohol or other drugs now and has problems because of this.
- Look out for behaviour that suggests alcohol or other drugs are being used. Also look for other signs and results of alcohol and drug use such as physical illness, injuries, drunkenness or strange behaviour.
- Find out which of the refugees are known to have been regular or heavy users of alcohol or other drugs before they became refugees. Such people are at special risk. Any demand or market for drugs is likely to start with them.

Previous heavy users or problem users

The refugees will usually know whether anyone in their community is using drugs in a harmful way. If there are no serious problems now, ask community leaders or others with influence if they know of people who were having problems from the use of alcohol and other drugs, or who used drugs every day, before they became refugees.

These persons are at special risk if alcohol or other drugs become available. Even if these persons are not using drugs now, the refugee leaders should try to involve them in community activities or meetings. This will help make them feel valued members of the group. It is important to give them a chance to do even small things for the welfare of all the refugees. Even as a refugee, the

former drug taker should be helped to feel more valued than when he or she took drugs.

Current users

- The community usually knows who is taking alcohol or drugs. People may be seen doing this or may show signs of using alcohol or other drugs. Different drugs create similar problems, but remember that each drug has its own particular effect on users.
- Different kinds of drug may be used in different areas. Most people will know which drugs are commonly abused in their area. Learn to recognize the special features of withdrawal from drugs and dependence on drugs that are common in your area. You can recognize dependence on a particular drug by its effects and withdrawal symptoms.
- Some users may be taking alcohol or some other drug every day because they cannot cope without. These people are “dependent”. Usually they have many problems. They damage their own health, they neglect their families, and they become a burden to their families and to the refugee community.

People who are dependent on a drug need to take the drug regularly. If they do not have their drug, or if the drug is taken away from them, they suffer distress and withdrawal symptoms — a mixture of physical and mental symptoms. They feel better almost as soon as they take their drug again.

- Some drugs cause dependence more easily than others. Different drugs cause different kinds of withdrawal symptoms. Sometimes these symptoms seem to be mental — someone might have a strong desire for the drug, get angry easily and not be able to concentrate. Cocaine and cannabis cause this kind of withdrawal symptoms. Heroin and alcohol produce physical withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal from heroin produces aches and pains all over the body. The person has difficulty sleeping, has a runny nose, watery eyes and sometimes gets diarrhoea. Someone who stops taking alcohol sleeps badly, becomes angry and restless easily, feels sick and may shake. In bad cases, the person may not be fully conscious. He or she may feel terrified, may see imaginary things and may even have fits like the fits that people with epilepsy sometimes have. Suddenly taking away alcohol from a person who is dependent on it can be dangerous. It can even cause death.
- Even people who are not dependent on drugs may have drug-related problems. These include health problems, poor nutrition, family problems, accidents, fights and other social problems. In a refugee camp, the use of drugs can lead to problems more quickly than in normal life.
- When illegal drugs are used, special problems occur. The distribution and sale of these drugs are unlawful and their suppliers are criminals. This

brings special problems to the refugee community. The users of illegal drugs may also be considered criminals and so they may face extra risks.

- People who take drugs sometimes take an overdose (a dangerously large dose) or have a bad reaction to a drug. Some people have unusual reactions to drugs, but this is not common. Overdose occurs mostly with alcohol and medical drugs like barbiturates or tranquillizers. Overdose may lead to coma and even death.

Helping people who admit they have a drug problem

Sometimes drug users can be motivated to help themselves or accept the help of others. They can decide not only to stop taking drugs but also to live a more meaningful life. When drug users admit they have a problem they start to have a good chance of giving up the drug. Work patiently with such people to help them control their drug problems, stop using the drug and change all the behaviour that goes with drug use. This may be easier in a refugee camp than in normal life because, living with the other refugees, the drug user is less isolated.

- Find out who among the refugees is willing to help drug users. Organize a group of helpers and arrange for them to meet together. Explain to them the risks of heavy use of drugs. Discuss with them ways in which they can help users of drugs to control their problem.
- Explain that the most useful skill is the ability to talk to drug users in a friendly way. Suggest that each helper talks to one drug user as part of the community effort to control the problem. Tell them not to give orders. They should try to find out what the drug users feel about their problem and how likely it is that they can control it. Each helper should talk and listen to the drug user they are helping every day for a week. Then have another meeting with the helpers. At this meeting, they can tell one another about their experiences. They should describe their difficulties and discuss ways of overcoming them.
- Ask the helpers to discuss why drug users fail to control their problem. Explain that there may be many reasons for this. Drug users may not wish to change because they are not interested in any other aspect of life. They may be used to this way of life. They may not have any other interests. They may not feel part of society or of their families. They may have had unpleasant symptoms when they stopped using the drug for a time in the past.
- Ask the helpers what they can do to overcome these barriers.
- Suggest that the helpers continue to see the individuals they are helping regularly during the following weeks.

People can and do stop taking drugs, especially when others show an interest in helping them. The helpers, just by meeting drug users regularly, may help them to change. Change may also happen because the community shows an interest in the drug users. People who live in a refugee community can feel a particularly strong interest in others and sense of community care.

Fear of withdrawal symptoms can be a reason for not stopping drug use. Most users can stop taking their drug if they are determined to do so, without using any other drug. Sometimes stopping a drug suddenly can cause serious symptoms, and it is necessary to prescribe some medicine. Withdrawal is a threat to life only for the few people who are severely dependent on alcohol or drugs.

Helpers must know when special help is needed. It may not be easy to find a doctor in an emergency or when there is special problem. You or the helpers may have to handle the situation.

When possible, a link with the health care services should be set up for the times when you need to send people with severe complications to a specialist doctor. When doctors or nurses visit the refugee group, discuss the possibility of setting up this kind of link.

Problems that may arise when alcohol and other drugs are used

Drunken behaviour

One problem is drunken or intoxicated behaviour. A drunken person may be violent and aggressive. Some people are always aggressive after drinking alcohol, but they can usually control aggressive behaviour if they know that other people will not accept it. When a drunken person behaves violently in public it is best to take the person away or persuade the other people to go away. Never challenge someone who is drunk and aggressive or try to stop the behaviour. He or she may try to attack you. It is usually much better to agree with the drunken person and to try to get the person away from the situation that is causing the violent reaction.

Overdose

An overdose may cause a person to become unconscious. Watch an unconscious person carefully to avoid other harm. Pay special attention to the person's breathing. Patients who are unconscious after taking alcohol often have low levels of glucose in their blood. This can damage the brain, and the damage can remain even after the alcohol has been cleared from the body. An unconscious person should not be given anything by mouth; he or she may need to be given glucose by injection. A trained health worker should do this.

Withdrawal

The symptoms that people experience when they stop taking alcohol or other drugs can be relieved in various ways. Sometimes medicines may be necessary. Diazepam and similar medicines can help to prevent the dangerous withdrawal effects that occur with severe alcohol dependence. They should be given only for a short time and the dose should be reduced gradually.

People who stop taking alcohol may have times when they are not fully conscious. These people may have fits, or be confused. They may also see things that are not there. In such cases medicines such as diazepam may be given for a short time, and the doses gradually reduced.

People going through withdrawal from alcohol or other drugs should not be left alone. Someone they know well should stay with them. This should be someone who is able to communicate clearly with them and stimulate them to remain conscious. The surroundings should also be stimulating, with good light, for example. If the condition of the person going through alcohol withdrawal becomes much worse, a small amount of alcohol may be given, especially if there are no medicines available.

The helpers should also speak to the families of the alcohol and drug users they are helping. A person who cuts down or stops using drugs should be praised and congratulated on the achievement. Family, friends and helpers should show their satisfaction and give encouragement.

Helpers can tell drug users other things they can do to gain respect. Bring together the helpers and those who have stopped taking drugs to discuss how much others in the community appreciate the change. Helpers and former users can plan together things the former drug users can do that the community would value. They can discuss together how to avoid falling back into drug use.

Former drug users can plan ways to stop the supply of alcohol and other drugs to the refugees. In this way they will be helping the whole community and strengthening their loyalty to one another. They will have a sense of a united effort to protect themselves from being used by outsiders.

Helpers should keep in regular contact with the former users to help them to maintain the changes they have made in their lives. In this way they can also reach current drug users.

Helpers should encourage former drug users to speak to current users and help them stop using drugs. Explain to the helpers that regular contact over a long period is needed to make sure that former drug users do not start taking drugs again.

One way of helping people who have stopped taking alcohol or other drugs is to find them a useful task or encourage them to find a useful task. This task

could be to help other drug users to stop taking drugs. Or it may be to stop the supply of drugs to the refugee community.

Everyone should show how much they value the efforts of the helpers. But remember that success depends greatly on the continuing organized efforts of the refugee community to prevent more drug problems occurring in future.