

Facts:

- **76.3 million persons diagnosed with alcohol use disorders**
- **At least 15.3 million persons diagnosed with drug use disorders.**
- **Injecting drug use reported in 136 countries; 93 countries report having HIV infection among this population.**
- **For every dollar invested in drug treatment, 7 dollars are saved in health and social costs.**

Management of Substance Dependence

What is substance dependence?

Substance dependence is a chronic and relapsing behavioural disorder, caused by repeated and often prolonged and/or heavy use of psychoactive substances. It is characterized by the continued use of these substances despite physical and mental problems, strong desire to take the substance(s), difficulties in controlling substance use, neglect of other activities and interests in favour of using or seeking the drug, increased tolerance and sometimes a withdrawal syndrome

once drug use is abruptly ceased.

Dependence is not the result of the lack of will power or moral weakness. Often, complete abstinence can not be easily achieved and therefore treatment must include effective ways of decreasing morbidity and mortality related to substance use, and increasing the quality of life of the patient until he/she can achieve the ultimate goal of a drug free life. *Currently, effective treatments do exist and need to be widely used to achieve these goals.*

Impact

In 2000, alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use ranked among the top 10 leading risk factors for the disease burden in developed countries, and alcohol and tobacco among the top 5 leading risk factors worldwide. Injecting drug use is one of the main factors accounting for the spread of HIV/AIDS in many countries in Europe and Asia. Both alcohol and illicit drug consumption and associated harm are increasing worldwide. In Europe alone, alcohol was responsible for over 55,000 deaths among young people aged 15-29 years in 1999.



What can be done?

Psychosocial interventions and pharmacotherapy are proven to be cost-effective alternatives to imprisonment or non-treatment of substance dependence, while brief interventions are proven to be a cost-effective and simple approach for those with early problems related to alcohol.

Special services for injecting drug users, close to where needed, linked to treatment services and medical care, have a significant impact in reducing the transmission of HIV.

Investing in treatment is sound public health policy.

What will WHO do?

WHO will assist countries in the development, organization, monitoring and evaluation of treatment and other services:

For alcohol problems, wide dissemination of brief interventions integrated into the primary health care system.

For drug problems, management of drug dependence, including service organization, capacity building and evaluation of substitution treatments for opioid dependence and interventions for problems related to use of amphetamine type stimulants.

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