

Old drug, new hope for addicts

Breakthrough for Durban rehab clinic

TRISH BEAVER

COVERAGE on *Carte Blanche's* investigation programme has catapulted a Durban drug rehabilitation clinic into the news. Assisted Recoveries Centres of Africa (Arca) say they do not have all the answers when it comes to addiction but they have a unique weapon in their armoury against heroin addiction.

They promote the use of a drug, naltrexone, that was developed over

40 years ago to help addicted Vietnam veterans returning from the war with a heroin addiction.

The problem with many returning Vietnam vets was that they could not simply return to normal life because they were psychologically wounded and had a chronic craving for heroin, which they had used in their attempt to cope with the confusion and chaos of the jungle warfare.

The United States government realised it had to find a solution to treat

mass addiction in their returning soldiers. The most common heroin therapy used to treat drug addicts is methadone. The problem with methadone is that while it is not as destructive as heroin, it is still highly addictive.

The difference with naltrexone is that it is not addictive. It is designed to suppress the "pleasure" receptors in the brain which respond to opiates. So when an addict takes a heroin hit, he or she will derive no pleasure, while on the naltrexone treatment. This enables the addict to finally break the addictive cycle.

But an addict has to commit to taking the naltrexone regularly. Naltrexone has also proved to be very effective in treating alcoholism and some forms of over-the-counter medicines that have opiates in them.

Part of the clinic's success is the short rehabilitation period and the out-patient therapy. The addicts are put through an intensive detoxification programme where the drugs are neutralised and flushed out of their system while under sedation.

This is complemented by psychological counselling and immediate therapy with naltrexone. For unknown reasons, the use of naltrexone as a rehabilitation option went into decline and was replaced in rehabilitation therapy by the much more expensive and addictive methadone.

Dr Prakash Naidoo, a trained anaesthetist, began to research the drug and examined the history of the Vietnam war veterans. He said: "The U.S. soldiers committed some terrible atrocities in that war [and] turned to using opiates in part from the ongoing frustration of the war and also because they felt angry at the circumstances. I am not sure if the drugs made them commit the atrocities or if they did some of those terrible things because they felt so outwitted by the enemy."



LEFT: Addicts should be treated as sufferers, says Naidoo. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



LEFT, INSET: Dr Prakash Naidoo of Arca. PHOTO: TRISH BEAVER

Naidoo says addicts lose all sense of conscience when their craving for the drug takes over. They rob, steal and betray their families for their next fix. That is why he believes that addiction should be taken seriously and that the state should subsidise rehabilitation programmes and the treatment options.

He said: "Addiction has always carried a stigma, and drug addicts are treated as if they are morally corrupt or weak-willed, but the simple fact is that they have an illness ..."

Naidoo says that half of all his patients have managed to remain clean and the other half have come back to re-enter rehabilitation.

"At least they know with our method that we can get them clean and functioning in a week, and it hardly interrupts their life."

"The saddest thing is the cost of importing naltrexone. It is not manufactured locally and we have to get

it from America. But treating a patient with naltrexone is R1 200 per month in comparison to a R3 500 drug habit."

He insists that addicts who are accepted on to the programme have strong family support.

"Any addiction causes people to be isolated; often they will be hated and will be targets of contempt. In this scenario they will be sorely tempted to go back to their old habits. They need the help of their family and friends and the naltrexone acts like a 'crash helmet', protecting the brain from the physical side effects of the drug should the addict try to get high. But family support will act as the emotional buffer zone they need."

• Assisted Recovery Centres of Africa can be reached at a 24-hour helpline 078 27 22 911 for a confidential consultation.

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Australian boy (14) jailed for drugs in Bali

BALI – An Australian teenager was sentenced to two months in detention yesterday for buying drugs while vacationing with family on Indonesia's resort island of Bali.

Presiding Judge Amzer Simanjuntak told the Denpasar district court that, when taking into account time already served, the 14-year-old will be freed in just over a week and deported.

The boy, who cannot be identified by name because of his age, admitted to buying 3,6 grams of marijuana from a man in front of a supermarket. He repeatedly expressed remorse. – Sapa-AP.



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