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Treating junkies on Methadone proves more effective and cheaper

METHADONE, a synthetic anti-addictive drug, is now seen here as a more effective — and cheaper — way of treating drug addicts.

It helps overcome the burden of maintaining them in rehabilitation centres or prisons where addicts, upon release, often reverted to crime and end up back in rehab centres.

In Malaysia, the government spends RM27 a day to treat and maintain a drug addict whereas a 60 milligram dose of methadone a day costs about RM6.

Malaysian AIDS Foundation (MAF) chairman Prof Dr Adeeba Kamarulzaman said the government and MAF has been conducting research on methadone treatment since its introduction here in 2005. It proved more effective in getting the drug addicts to kick the habit.

"Our survey found the risk of addicts taking methadone and returning to rehab was two per cent compared to the 8.8 per cent of addicts who returned for rehabilitation," said Adeeba. She was addressing a seminar themed Enabling Environment in Harm Reduction through Advocacy at a hotel here yesterday.

"The methadone dosage for each addict depended on how extensive the addiction was but the dosage was about the same as the drugs consumed by the addict before."

Methadone is a controlled drug obtained only on recommendation of a doctor.

"It takes at least two years of methadone use for an addict to kick his addiction. However, in the case of heroin addicts, they may have to rely on methadone for the rest of their lives," said

Adeeba, adding that due to the effectiveness of methadone, MAF wants the government to expand

this programme to other agencies.

"So far, 240 facilities nationwide have implemented the methadone treatment covering 10,664 addicts."

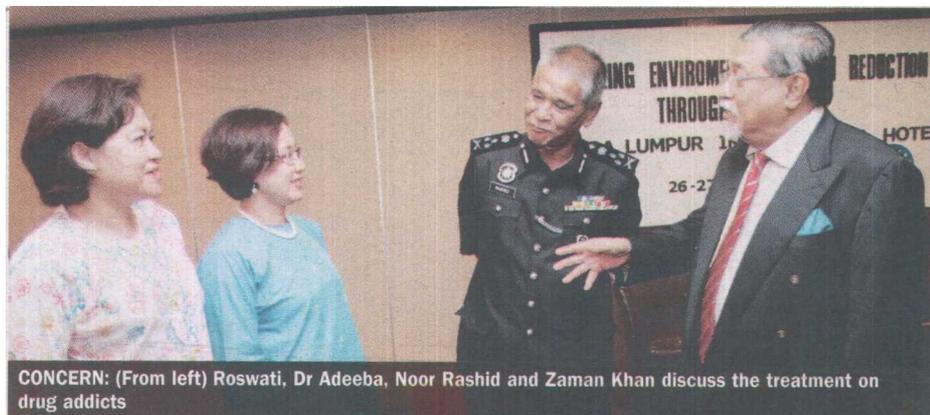
Methadone is also supplied to addicts in police custody.

"When methadone treatment was first made available from 2005, there were criticisms against the programme but since then public perception has changed due to its relative effectiveness," said Adeeba.

Also present at the two-day seminar, which ends today, were Federal Police Narcotics Department director, Commissioner Datuk Noor Rashid Ibrahim and Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC) president Tan Sri Mohd Zaman Khan. The seminar is aimed at creating a more conducive environment to reduce the risk of HIV infection among drug addicts.

Noor Rashid felt methadone treatment has been an effective alternative approach to rehabilitating drug addicts.

"Charging drug addicts in court before sending them to rehab centres or prisons is insufficient to curb the problem as many addicts return to crime."



CONCERN: (From left) Roswati, Dr Adeeba, Noor Rashid and Zaman Khan discuss the treatment on drug addicts