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MOST recovering opiate dependents do not socialise outside their circle of friends, who are also recovering addicts. This is due to the fear of rejection by their community.

Dr Arulalan Kumaran, deputy co-ordinator of Hospital Sungai Buloh's clinical research centre, hopes that this will change with the Hinduism Empowerment In Addiction Rehabilitation & Treatment (HEART) programme, a pilot project that is expected to kick off in January next year, pending approval from the authorities.

Responsible for heading the pilot project, which will target 25 patients and take place at the hospital's Sri Siva Subramaniam Temple, Dr Arulalan hopes HEART will act as a platform to re-integrate the recovering opiate dependents into mainstream society.

"For decades, this minority group of addicts has suffered the rejection meted out by family members, employers and society. This group of patients who have not attended any social function will be invited to weddings, birthdays parties, and family day functions.

"Hopefully, this will enhance their self-esteem and motivate them to stay clean of drugs, while the weekly regime of coming to the temple which these patients have for a long time not done is a simple way to instill discipline."

Elaborating on the programme, Dr Arulalan said HEART consists of 22 modules. They are psycho-education modules regarding the significance of lighting a lamp during prayer, the reason Hindu's apply the holy ash on the forehead, significance of ringing of bells in the temple, coconut offering and its significance.

The programme will be conducted in collaboration with the temple committee members, local community leaders, veteran politicians and NGOs. All programmes will be conducted every Sunday morning from 9am till 12pm.

"Patients will be required to take their dose of methadone before the



Dr Arulalan says the HEART pilot project is to start in January

start of the programme. All participants will then join in the singing of devotional songs in the temple premises. They are then taught from the 22 modules prepared. These are 22 Aachaaraas translated from the scriptures," said Dr Arulalan.

The aim of the programme is for the patient to understand scientifically, rationally and logically the meaning of each and every Aachaaraas. In Hinduism, Aachaaraas or rituals are followed for the psychological and physiological well-being, for prosperity and wealth, strong family and social bonding.

Dr Arulalan believes this community-based approach will empower the public to play a vital role in rehabilitating this stigmatised group of patients.

He said HEART will enable the community to lend a hand to the medical fraternity in psychosocial intervention as the lack of psychologists in the public sector is a stumbling block to the expansion of the methadone maintenance treatment programme (MMT).

He added that all religious institutions should actively and extensively participate through religious or cultural psychosocial intervention and support the government's mission to reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.