New mapping tool to tackle drug addiction

A pioneering new tool for drug workers and clinicians to promote behaviour change in drug-dependent clients is endorsed today by the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA).

Extensive research has shown that this easy-to-use and innovative technique – which enables drug workers to visually represent their clients’ thinking in a series of personal maps – improves the engagement and motivation of drug misusers.

An NTA report, *Routes to Recovery*, shows that the full benefit of mapping is realised when coupled with a focus on how services are organised, and that the combination of the two makes drug treatment services stronger and more efficient.

The NTA is therefore recommending the approach as a welcome addition to the toolkit of psychosocial interventions – or ‘talking therapies’ – that are available to the drug treatment field as proven techniques for improving outcomes.

Speaking at the British Psychological Society conference on new developments in the psychology of addiction, Annette Dale-Perera, the NTA Director of Quality, said today:

“We need a broad approach to treating drug dependency, providing a variety of interventions for different clients with a range of problems. These pilot schemes demonstrate that the combination of mapping and management significantly contribute to an individual’s progression to recovery, and put psychosocial interventions at the heart of the delivery of drug treatment.”

The concept of mapping was originated and developed in the US, culminating in a robust evidence base indicating that it improved treatment outcomes, which UK practitioners were keen to emulate.

The UK testing programme involved 2,500 service users and 750 staff in Greater Manchester, London, and Birmingham, and was sponsored by the NTA on the basis of initial research findings from the United States.

Clients of these services were found to have:

- better rapport with keyworkers;
- better levels of engagement and participation in their treatment;
- higher levels of motivation for their treatment programme;
- increased benefit from better peer support; and
- improved psychological functioning.

Furthermore, keyworkers were more positive about their organisation, more open to training and more able to incorporate it into their everyday practice. Ongoing supervision as well as initial training for workers was found to be critical to success.
Dr Louise Sell, Service Director for the Greater Manchester West NHS Mental Health Foundation Trust, said; "Mapping-enhanced treatment has become the cornerstone of our strategy for delivering psychosocial interventions to our client groups".

Notes to editors

The NTA was set up by the Government in 2001 to improve the availability, capacity and effectiveness of treatment for drug misuse in England.

Routes to Recovery, an executive summary of lessons learned from the International Treatment Effectiveness Project (ITEP) and the Birmingham Treatment Effectiveness Initiative (BTEI) is available on the NTA-website at http://www.nta.nhs.uk/areas/workforce/psychosocial_tools.aspx.

The NTA is also publishing a series of manuals and reports that can be used by practitioners to improve treatment and organisational effectiveness.

Professor Dwayne Simpson, head of the Institute of Behavioral Research, Texas Christian University (TCU), developed and evaluated the technique of placing psychosocial interventions at the heart of drug treatment.

ITEP was set up in greater Manchester and London to further test this approach, which BTEI built on and developed through a programme of work undertaken in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

The 2007 clinical guidelines (‘Drug misuse and dependence: UK guidelines on clinical management’, produced by the Department of Health) endorsed mapping techniques and said they “have been found to enhance both the therapeutic relationship and treatment engagement, and to improve the patient’s memory and understanding of the therapeutic session”.

The conference where Annette Dale-Perera is speaking at is the BPS’ Division of Clinical Psychology – Faculty of Addictions event on ‘Developments in the Psychology of Addiction’, at the BPS in London on Thursday 19 February 2009.

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