

Bringing Services to the People - Drug and Alcohol Services in the Southern Health Board

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The aim of the Southern Health Boards Drug and Alcohol Programme is to provide a comprehensive client centred service to people affected by substance misuse. The Drug and Alcohol Services are constantly under review and are responding to changing conditions in society. Drug and alcohol dependency is a complex issue, which may require many different approaches depending on the particular individual. The philosophy of the Southern Health Board relating to alcoholism and drug use is primarily to strive for abstinence where possible. A wide range of services are provided to support the individual towards a drug free lifestyle. From a study 'Smoking, Alcohol & Drug Use in Cork and Kerry' carried out by Dr. T.M.R. Jackson for the SHB in 1997 it was found that alcohol use was widespread with 78% of the surveyed group being current users. It also found that 23% of men drink in excess of the recognised guidelines. Alcohol is still the dominant drug of misuse in terms of prevalence and problem use.

Smoking and alcohol use, precede drug use and are highly associated with increased drug use (Jackson 1997). Cannabis, hallucinogens and stimulants showed 18% use in their lifetime, and 7% recent use. Opiate use showed lifetime use of 1% and current use of almost nil.

The Southern Health Board's Approach

The Southern Health Board has established a committee of Board members to address the issues of prevention and treatment of alcohol and substance abuse. This committee consists of eleven health board members, the Programme Manager, Community Care, the General Manager with responsibility for drug and alcohol services and relevant disciplines within the Board's services. The Co-ordinator of Services for Drug and Alcohol Abuse is secretary to this committee.

Prevention

The Board is actively promoting programmes, which have proven successful in influencing young people's decisions around drug and alcohol misuse. Health Education Officers from our Health Promotion Department engage with schools and clubs throughout the Boards area to assist them in the implementation of guidelines for effective policy relating to drug misuse. For teenagers the programme 'On My Own Two Feet' is receiving positive response in secondary schools and for primary schools the 'Walk Tall' programme.

To coincide with Drug Prevention Week the Board organised an Art Competition for young people. The response was excellent and the winning entries were used in the production of the Southern Health Board calendar for 1999. All communities are encouraged to develop courses which are guided by the programme 'Drugs Questions Local Answers'. The Board are actively involved in training facilitators for these programmes throughout Cork and Kerry.

Treatment

The treatment services in the Southern Health Board are centred in the Community Care Programme and are supported by General Practitioners and the Psychiatric and General Hospital services. Disciplines within the health services who engage with families and individuals are encouraged to avail of the expertise of the addiction services when alcohol or drug use is a cause for concern. Many front line health

workers refer families to the addiction services for initial assessment. This assessment takes the form of a discussion between the affected person their family member and a counsellor.

Following this appointment the client is encouraged to make a decision based on the information presented. Medical assessment followed by an individual treatment plan, which is arrived at in consultation with the client and family where appropriate, is found to be the most effective approach to date. Where possible, clients are encouraged to strive for the goal of abstinence from all mood-altering substances. However, it is also recognised that abstinence may not be possible to achieve in the short term and for those with Opiate (Heroin) dependency ongoing maintenance is provided through the Methadone Protocol.

Since 1984 the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services are centred at Arbour House in the grounds of St. Finbarr's Hospital, Cork City. The philosophy of the Board is to offer treatment where possible on an 'outpatient' basis. Specially trained addiction counsellors staff the treatment services. At Arbour House there are two treatment programmes available. The Adult programme, which is based on the Minnesota Model of treatment which has as its core, the 12 Steps philosophy as developed by Alcoholics Anonymous and is orientated towards family involvement where possible. An aftercare programme follows initial treatment.

The geography of the Southern Health Board's catchment area Cork and Kerry poses difficulties for some people to access the services. With this in mind the Board has now increased the counselling staff almost 100% in the past two years and established additional counselling services in the north of Cork City, in West Cork and in Kerry. Waiting time for an appointment to see a counsellor is now down to just a few days. Making services more accessible will also increase their utilisation. In the coming year we expect to increase our applications for treatment services from the current level of 1000 per year.

In certain circumstances residential treatment may be the most appropriate response, and to cater for these needs the board are currently establishing closer links with the adult programmes in Cork and Kerry. A specialised treatment centre for adolescents has recently been established in County Kilkenny. In conjunction with the Department of Health and Children and two other health boards we have entered into an agreement to purchase treatment places in order to meet our needs.

Local Drugs Task Force

With the establishment of the Cork Local Drugs Task Force the Southern Health Board has taken an active role in ensuring that appropriate responses are made to changing conditions. The Board provides secretarial and co-ordination services to the Task Force. Twenty-one projects have been funded under this initiative. The Co-ordinator assists these projects to develop their programmes in accordance with the overall strategic plan for the city. These projects are currently being independently evaluated with a view to establishing them on a more permanent basis. A number of these projects have employed outreach workers to engage with young people and their families, thus bringing closer links to the communities. The Health Board Addiction Services are there to support these outreach workers in guiding clients to address drug and alcohol misuse issues.