Alcohol Addiction Treatment

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Eur Addict Res 2001;7:47

Editorial

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Considering the fact that the treatment of alcohol dependency will, in the long term, have only marginal success rates, the necessity of investing more research capacity into different treatment options becomes obvious. This not only concerns established treatment modalities such as withdrawal and detoxification, but also other forms of low-threshold treatment options that may already be implemented in some countries and be considered in others. Obviously, a special topic of *European Addiction Research* will not be able to cover all the different aspects of the treatment of alcoholism. Therefore, the topic of the treatment of alcoholism is a special topic that will need to come up again and again.

The aim of this special topic is to present current research reports from four very different areas of the treatment of alcoholism. The first paper by Bourquin-Tièche et al. from Lausanne, Switzerland, deals with the treatment of a subsample of alcohol-dependent patients in an in-patient alcohol unit, namely severely impaired alcohol-dependent patients. Generally, there is a consensus that addiction treatment can only be successful when the patient is motivated to change his/her addictive behaviour. Involuntary treatment is usually rejected by most addiction specialists. Nonetheless, there may exist special subsamples of addicts for whom involuntary treatment can show a beneficial effect. The research report from the colleagues from Lausanne represents a follow-up study on such a subsample of alcoholics, for whom the criteria for the success of treatment need to be shifted towards the aspects of health stabilisation and quality of life. The study can be considered an interesting incentive for future research on adequate subsamples for involuntary treatment.

The research report by Neto et al. from Lisbon, Portugal, represents an evaluation of a treatment modality that can be considered more mainstream. An in-patient detox-

ification treatment programme is described and a follow-up after 1 year of its conclusion with respect to two factors that affect outcome. There are many other studies evaluating the work of detoxification units. This study allows other centres to compare their programmes with a similar structure in other countries.

The paper by Reymann and Danziger from Dortmund, Germany, presents an innovative treatment setting where in-patient treatment is replaced in part by a day clinic setting. In the future, it will be important to evaluate alternatives to mainstream treatment programmes such as day clinic and other out-patient settings, in order to be able to ascertain which setting is best for which patients. In fact, these considerations may lead us to look for alternatives for the treatment of alcoholism, even going as far as considering a maintenance treatment comparable to the maintenance treatment of opiate addicts.

The last paper of this special topic deals with a classic modality of alcoholism treatment, Alcoholics Anonymous, comparing its activities with those of Narcotics Anonymous. By such a comparison, we are able to get a clearer understanding of the impact of the 12-step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous. The evaluation may allow us to integrate such a treatment modality into addiction treatment on a more specific level, by determining for which patients the 12 steps will lead to a better outcome.

The four papers from this special topic can only give us a small insight into the difficult problems encountered in the treatment of alcoholism. At the same time, the papers will allow us to re-evaluate our own work and especially to look at the question of which treatment modalities are best for which subsample of patients. Trying to establish such a differentiation of treatment settings according to different patient subsamples will be the greatest challenge for the treatment of alcoholism in the future.