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## Going Swiss?

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*The paper by Vader et al. presents an extensive project aimed at getting clearer guidance as to how, when and in which situations to use methadone for the treatment of heroin dependence. The RAND appropriateness method was used for the first time in the literature on methadone maintenance treatment, providing numerous insights into the reality of treating persons with heroin dependence at various stages of their life, addiction, and concurrent problems. It also provided insight into the many areas where little evidence and no consensus exists as how to deal with a condition which has been around for so many years. Research continues to be a priority in this field.*

*The RAND method requires a substantial amount of resources, which are out of reach to the majority countries – the process, not only the results of the application of the RAM would be of much value to the improvement of treatment and outcomes from heroin dependence. It is particularly helpful to document what is inappropriate as well, and the information can guide the development of clinical practice guidelines, standards of care, and training for health professionals of various backgrounds which get in contact with heroin dependents.*

*Another advantage of the method is its base on real practice, which differs from purely evidence-based guidelines, which rely on randomized clinical trials – these are well controlled and have the rigor needed in science, but lack a link with the reality of patients and professionals. The RAM seems to be a step forward in translating research into best practice and improving the quality of care. As recommended by the authors, the next step in the Swiss project should be the development and wide dissemination of clinical guidelines. It is expected that the implementation of such clinical guidelines will be easier after all the steps that have been taken, but that remains to be seen. It is known how difficult it is to change clinical practice, and such changes often need to be supported by a variety of incentives and changes in the financ-*

*ing, organization and delivery of the health care at the local, regional and national levels.*

*From an international perspective, it would be interesting to undertake a similar exercise in different countries with different policies and experience with methadone at the same time – this could lead to simplified international recommendations, relevant to a variety of countries with different realities. Experts from a variety of countries and backgrounds could form a panel needed for the assessment, in a way similarly to the expert panels set up by the World Health Organization for the review of various topics related to drug dependence. This could also be a forum to debate and generate the most appropriate way of including the legal, societal and health care system perspectives that can not be addressed in single country studies using RAM.*

*At present, the evidence from RCTs and the numerous controlled studies on the effectiveness of methadone has not been yet sufficiently convincing evidence for the adoption or wide use of methadone in many countries. One of the reasons might be the lack of participation of clinicians and experts from these countries in the process of determining when, how and to whom methadone and other heroin treatments should be given. Another, as it is known, is discrimination, prejudice and stigma regarding drug dependence. A third, identified in the present project, is the limitation of the research which has been undertaken in a limited number of countries to the rest of the world.*

*As pointed out by the authors, the project generated several areas where research is needed. At the same time, the analysis of the Swiss literature indicated the flaws in many of the studies conducted in Switzerland and the need for better designed and more rigorous research. It is hoped that the identification of research priorities will be followed by well planned studies which will actually address the questions still open regarding treatment for heroin dependence.*

*In any event, most of the recommendations made by the panel, while appropriate and feasible within the reality of Switzerland, are far from reach to most other countries with more recent and epidemic increases in heroin use and addiction. Going Swiss, while commendable, remains “a pie in the*

*sky” for the rest of the world. The insights brought up by this project may serve as an incentive to donors, international organizations and research institutions to mobilize the resources needed to improve the care of people with heroin dependence.*



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