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THERAPEUTIC SERVICES FOR ADOLESCENT HEROIN USERS IN AN OUTPATIENT PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PROGRAM

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Objectives: In the present study we intend to show the effectiveness of therapeutic services provided to adolescent drug users.

Method: The Counseling Center for Combating Drug Abuse offers an outpatient counseling psychotherapeutic program for substance users. For adolescent users the program is adjusted to their needs, which are defined by the substance type, the drug use history, and the adolescent personal, familial, social, and academic level. No medication for withdrawal syndrome or maintenance therapy is administered, while there is psychiatric care in the case of comorbidity. The program's length is individualized, and usually lasts two years. Family is involved in the therapeutic procedure, as it constitutes the basic supportive system for adolescents. Dysfunctional families are helped to resolve their problems. Great emphasis is also given to the peer group. Our goal for the adolescent is to distance himself from friends involved with drug use, to empower the existing relationships with persons who keep off substances, and to be encouraged to make new, healthy relationships. As heroin user usually presents a decline in academic success, or has already stopped school, successful comeback is a critical therapeutic goal.

Results: From our data emerges that the effectiveness of therapy depends directly both on the progress in individual level and on the positive changes in the other three levels of intervention (family, friends, school).

Conclusions: An outpatient drug addiction psychotherapeutic program for adolescent users can be effective when it considers user not only as an individual but within his family, school and social environment.