

On Controversy Surrounding Response to AIDS and Drug Addiction

I found the publication *Controversy Surrounding Response to AIDS and Drug Addiction* interesting and rather controversial, yet necessary and timely. Perhaps for the first time the author addresses certain issues which used to be the subject of debate only in informal settings among professionals, experts and politicians. However, without raising these issues for public discussion, we will never be able to solve them, and the fairest decisions are usually made after listening to all the parties involved.

A significant part in the publication is devoted to evaluations of methadone treatment, which are indeed ambiguous. It is true that addiction treatment, no matter what tactics or methods are chosen by specialists together with the patient, is rather inefficient considering the rates of patients who have fully given up substance abuse. In my opinion, the part of the publication which discusses the effectiveness of harm reduction measures is of considerable importance. In this regard I think that there is not enough discussion going on over the differences between harm reduction programmes and treatment programmes. It is also very important to agree on what criteria the indicators of programme effectiveness have to be based. Because today when talking about programme effectiveness indicators we forget that the programme is exclusively defined as a treatment programme and put forward indicators such as crime reduction, reduction in anti-social behaviour, etc., which are clearly the criteria of harm reduction.

The publication also, in its own way, looks into such issues as stigma and destigmatization, moral education evaluation and social tolerance, which are very important. I find these issues worthy of further attention and they are and will be assessed controversially. Although today in Lithuania one can only hear some isolated statements regarding possible legalization of certain drugs, it would be a mistake to pretend that such a debate and such opinions do not exist, a mistake which makes it simple to overlook certain processes going on in different groups of society.

Another important thing about the book is that it gives proper attention to case management implementation. In mental health care, and addiction in particular, the role of case management is becoming more and more important in achieving positive results and helping the patient and his/her family to get a handle on variety of possibilities and necessities.

Still I want to thank the author mostly for provoking the discussion on variety of addiction related issues. So far, unfortunately, we have tried to establish or adopt rules and regulations, and accept them as an absolute dogma, and if anyone thinks otherwise, we consider that person to be wrong, incompetent or just inadequate. Along with the author, I would like to invite everyone to be more flexible and open to different opinions and we will see that we ourselves are not always right and that right decisions could be arrived at only in an open discussion.



O. Davidonienė

The Director of State Mental Health Centre