

ALL ABOUT HEROIN ADDICTION

Picture A (cover): Picture of a line of people linked in some way, looking welcoming. have photo or drawing of police, health workers and government officials looking welcoming since this brochure is designed for them

This brochure is for the policemen and other civil servants who serve the community. It is designed to provide straightforward information about HIV and drug use in our community. The Vice Minister for Health, Wang Longde, says “China is at a very critical stage for controlling HIV/AIDS ...If we take this opportunity and implement effective measures we can control the rapid increase of HIV/AIDS in China...If we lose the opportunity, this epidemic will build up to a much larger outbreak and by that time it will be too late to control it.” (Act Now, p7.). According to the Central Government it is essential that leaders at all levels work together to prevent an HIV epidemic in China. With increased understanding of drug use and drug use issues, the community can help drug users find healthy and effective ways to protect themselves and the community from HIV. HIV/AIDS is everyone’s problem. Let’s do something about it.

(reference Act Now at the back)

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE USE HEROIN, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY KNOW IT IS BAD FOR THEM?

Heroin is a very physically and psychologically powerful drug that acts on the body’s central nervous system to create:

- a euphoric rush;
- a warm feeling of relaxation;
- a sense of security and protection;
- a dissipation of pain, fear, hunger, tension and anxiety; and
- the disappearance of feelings of anger, frustration or aggression.

Many people use heroin when they have very painful social or family problems because it helps them cope with both physical and psychological pain. Some people are curious so they experiment with drugs and become addicted, and some people use heroin occasionally and never become addicted.

Picture B: Picture of the same line of people standing near each but not touching or looking at each other, looking unwelcoming

WHY IS IT DANGEROUS TO USE HEROIN?

The main problems faced by people who use heroin are health, social and discrimination issues.

- Health issues: Heroin users who inject may have health problems caused by sharing injecting equipment which can greatly increase the risk of catching HIV, and Hepatitis B and C.
- Social issues: Some people who use heroin have difficulty maintaining family relationships and employment and may have legal problems.
- Discrimination issues: Drug users often face discrimination by society, making it even more difficult for them to access health care, and get effective treatment for their addiction.

Heroin is a very addictive drug, which makes it extremely painful to stop using once you are addicted.

Physical withdrawal symptoms include:

- sweating;
- diarrhoea;
- insomnia
- nausea and vomiting; and
- muscle cramps and bone pain.

These symptoms are at their worst 2 – 3 days after last use and begin to subside after about a week.

Picture C: Picture of the young person looking sick? Lying on a couch?

Psychological addiction includes:

- addiction to the feelings associated with the “rush” of heroin;
- addiction to the feeling of well-being when using heroin;
- addiction to the absence of pain; and
- the fear of the pain of withdrawal.

These are all very powerful emotions that make it seem impossible to stop using when addicted, or cause people to relapse when they are feeling anxious or upset. Psychological addiction is very powerful and can last for many years.

WHY DO HEROIN USERS OFTEN SEEM TO RELAPSE?

Relapse is a normal part of the process of recovering from drug addiction and often happens several times before the person is able to quit for good.

Recovering users in Kunming have reported that some of the main causes for relapse are:

- financial destitution;

- difficulty finding employment;
- discrimination by family and society; and
- feeling bored, empty and hopeless.

What helps prevent relapse?

- Family support is one of the most important factors in preventing relapse. Most heroin users love and are loved by their friends and family. Watching someone you love struggling with addiction is very difficult. Families also need support to keep from giving up on the person they care about. If it was your child, wouldn't you want them to recover?
- Community support can help people who are recovering from drug dependence. Being employed and feeling accepted in the community are two of the most important ways to help former drug users stay clean.
- Substitution therapies such as methadone have been proven nationally and internationally to prevent relapse, at the same time decreasing other drug related harm.

HOW CAN WE HELP THE IDUS IN OUR COMMUNITY?

We can help our community by:

- referring IDUs to drug treatment agencies or other types of assistance;
- being understanding of the health problems involved in drug addiction and supporting people if they relapse;
- advocating for drug users with people who discriminate against them;
- being a useful resource for schools in drug education programs and taking part in community education about drugs and/or HIV risks; and
- not giving up on them!

A former drug user from Kunming said "No matter what I do, they (my parents) are always on my side and never give up. ... They provide me with both emotional and financial support. ... So I decided to give up (drug use)" (Chan and Lu, 2004).

Picture D: Picture of the young person being supported by his parents, have their arms around him and his hand on one of their hands

People addicted to heroin CAN recover. Please don't give up on them.

On the back:

The problems faced by people who use or have used drugs cause them to take unnecessary risks. People with drug dependence are people, like any of us, who have a health problem. If we give them more understanding and support them in our families and in the community we can help them and in this way, help all of the community.

A picture of a young person sitting in a chair, with two parents standing behind, each with a hand on the persons shoulder, with more people from various parts of the community (policemen, normal people, health workers) behind in a triangle shape so at the back you just see a vague outline of people's heads.