

For discussion on
2 July 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Support Measures for Rehabilitation of Students Abusing Drugs

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the support measures for rehabilitation of students abusing drugs.

Background

2. The rise of psychotropic substance abuse, particularly among our students, is posing significant challenges to the school sector. Other than enhancing preventive efforts in schools, the Administration also attaches great importance to providing support measures for rehabilitation of students abusing drugs.

Existing Treatment and Rehabilitation Services for Youth Drug Abusers

3. The current services on treatment and rehabilitation for youth drug abusers can be grouped into the following five categories –

- (a) counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers (CCPSAs) and Caritas Lok Heep Club subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) provide counselling services and other assistance to psychotropic substance abusers and youth at risk;
- (b) Substance Abuse Clinics (SACs) run by the Hospital Authority (HA) provide medical treatment to drug abusers with psychiatric problems;

- (c) methadone treatment programme (MTP) provided by the Department of Health (DH) offers both maintenance and detoxification options for opiate drug dependent persons of all ages through a network of 20 methadone clinics on an outpatient mode;
- (d) 39 residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses (DTRCs) run by 17 NGOs. 20 of them are subvented by DH or SWD whereas 19 are non-subvented. All except three are currently providing services to young drug abusers as well as adult abusers; and
- (e) compulsory drug treatment programme at drug addiction treatment centres (DATCs) operated by the Correctional Services Department for persons of 14 years old or above who are found guilty of offences punishable by imprisonment and addicted to drugs.

Rehabilitation Service for Student Drug Abusers

4. Under the existing mechanism, when schools suspect students to be drug abusers, they are advised to take the following measures, including notifying the parents concerned, consulting respective Police School Liaison Officers for advice and assistance, and referring the case to the school social workers (SSWs) and the student guidance personnel of schools for counselling and follow-up services.

5. Very often SSWs and the student guidance personnel would refer high risk or confirmed cases to CCPSAs, which are cluster-based, designated units providing preventive education services and community-based treatment and rehabilitation support to psychotropic substance abusers. At present, there are seven CCPSAs operated by non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as two centres run by Caritas Lok Heep Club, that serve the whole territory. During the treatment and rehabilitation process, students can continue their education in their original schools.

6. Apart from CCPSAs or Caritas Lok Heep Club, if student drug abusers who wish to seek residential treatment voluntarily, rehabilitation and social reintegration through a medical or non-medical model (such as gospel

affiliation), they may consider DTRCs, which are operated by NGOs. While young drug abusers are receiving drug treatment and rehabilitation services in DTRCs, educational programmes may be offered at the same time as part of the residential rehabilitation activities. Since 1995, the Education Bureau has been providing subvention for non-profit making voluntary agencies running DTRCs to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below, preparing them for continuation of schooling or employment upon full rehabilitation. The Educational Programme is funded at a rate of \$320,000 per annum for each unit of 10 students. In June 2009, 18 such educational programmes are operated in nine centres run by five NGOs. In addition, an NGO operates a private school co-located with two DTRCs to provide complementary services comprising both counselling and educational programmes to school-aged youngsters troubled by drugs.

7. The drug treatment programmes in SWD-subvented DTRCs usually lasts for around 12 months. Students after receiving drug treatment may resume schooling in a mainstream school or pursue other programmes, such as courses run by the Vocational Training Council. If there are difficulties in placing students back to the mainstream schools, EDB would offer placement service and adopt a low profile approach so as to avoid labelling effect on the one hand and to assist the students to integrate into normal school life on the other.

8. Should students, after drug rehabilitation, still have behavioural / emotional or family problems, they may be placed to Schools for Social Development (SSD) through a central referral mechanism. The SSD will provide intensive counselling and education guidance for the students with a view to helping them tide over their transient development difficulties and strengthening their life skills. Students with improvement will be reintegrated into mainstream schools as soon as possible. At present, there are seven aided SSDs providing about 1,000 school places under the subvention of the Education Bureau. The SWD also provides subvention for on-site residential care for students of six of these schools, including two for girls and four for boys.

9. For students who have committed drug-related or other crimes, professional intervention and support may be rendered through the Community Support Service Scheme and the Family Conference Scheme for

those subject to the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme. Probation service and DATC programme, among other sentencing options, are provided for those convicted.

Concerns of Schools

10. Owing to the increasing awareness of schools and parents on the youth drug abuse problem, some schools consider that the existing guidelines on handling and supporting students abusing drugs should be revised. To address concerns of schools, the Administration has commissioned an NGO to compile a Resource Kit for Schools in which useful guidelines and checklists for identifying, handling and supporting student drug abusers would be provided. The Kit will be made available to schools in the following school year. To help equip parents with the knowledge, attitude and skills to prevent and tackle children drug abuse, a Resource Kit for Parents has been developed and will be delivered to schools, Parent-Teacher Associations and their federations, probation offices and parent education service units starting from late June this year.

11. The enhancement of Government's effort to raise public awareness and to train stakeholders (including teachers, school social workers, doctors and parents) to identify drug abusers, coupled with the enhanced efforts by outreach and anti-drug workers, may unearth latent demand for downstream services. Furthermore, with the introduction of school-based voluntary drug testing scheme, more student drug abusers may be identified for early intervention. With the projected rise in demand, schools are also concerned about the capacity of the existing rehabilitation downstream support services for students, which will have to be enhanced.

Way Forward

12. The Administration would feasibly expand the existing rehabilitation support measures for student drug abusers and explore new services to be provided. Subject to availability of resources, the school social work service would be strengthened to complement the overall enhancement of anti-drug efforts in the school sector following progressive implementation of the healthy school policy. Likewise, subject to availability

of resources, CCPSAs would be strengthened to meet the urgent service demand to cope with the upsurge in youth drug abuse. HA also plans to increase the number of doctor sessions at the seven SACs in 2009/10.

13. In its report published in November 2008, the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse led by the Secretary for Justice put forward a treatment and rehabilitation strategy focusing on, among other things, enhancement of downstream programmes in terms of capacity and sophistication, as well as reintegration of drug abusers into society. The strategy has been further developed and taken forward in the context of the Fifth Three Year Plan on Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong (2009-2011) released in April 2009.

14. Regarding student drug abusers, the Three Year Plan recommended that -

- (a) apart from increase in service capacity, we should encourage development and advancement of new or proven service models that would better address the needs due to the changing drug scene. Quoting the Christian Zheng Sheng Association as an example, one idea is to develop more complementary services comprising drug treatment and rehabilitation programmes as well as educational programmes to school-aged youngsters. Another idea is providing shorter-term treatment and rehabilitation programmes for young psychotropic substance abusers which may cause less disruption to their work or schooling, help break the vicious cycle of those early experimenting with drugs, and can better motivate them to seek assistance;
- (b) EDB should continue to provide subvention for NGOs running DTRCs to operate educational programmes for young drug abusers aged 18 or below and keep reviewing the programme operation to meet the changing needs of young drug abusers;
- (c) EDB and SWD should take into account the special educational needs of students rehabilitating from drug problems when they consider the service demand and enhancement for SSD; and
- (d) that placement services by Regional Education Offices and Non-Attendance Team of EDB should continue to help rehabilitated

students return to normal schooling.

15. In sum, the Administration is working in full swing along the above policy directions to meet the needs of a wide spectrum of students abusing drugs covering occasional drug abusers, habitual drug abusers and those with relapse of drug abuse.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to give advice on the strategy and support measures for rehabilitation of student drug abusers.

Education Bureau
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