

Acupuncture Offered to Addicts as Alternative to Jail

Editorial Staff

For many years, it has been standard procedure to treat addicts within the criminal justice system as just that - criminals. Now, an innovative treatment program in one county in central Maryland is offering addicts not only a chance for recovery, but also an alternative to going through the arduous court system.

Montgomery County, which borders Washington, D.C., and includes the city of Rockville (home to the National Institutes of Health), has just launched a free program to provide drug addicts with acupuncture treatment. At the behest of County Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg, who sponsored a \$20,000 measure, auricular acupuncture treatment will be provided in county jails and treatment facilities. The county hired an acupuncturist, David Wurzel, PE, MAC, LAc, to train 30 other acupuncturists to provide treatment, beginning Feb. 4. The specific procedure itself was developed by the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association based out of Vancouver, Wash.

Wurzel told *The Examiner* newspaper on Feb. 8, "A lot of folks in early recovery haven't developed life skills, so this [the acupuncture treatment] calms them down."

According to *The Examiner*, six people opted for the treatment the second day it was available. By the third day, the number had more than doubled to 16. Wurzel commented, "It's only our fourth day offering it, and providers have said they're already noticing a difference."

Trachtenberg, a clinical social worker specializing in treading adolescent addiction before being elected to county office, explained that the program being used in Montgomery County is based upon a program in the Miami-Dade County court system in Florida, the first in the nation.

In the Florida program, defendants are given the option of participating in the program, which will take a minimum of a year to complete. Phase I (detox) takes an average of 12 to 15 days, during which time patients receive group and individual counseling, 12-step fellowship meetings and inpatient treatment, if necessary. About 85 percent of patients will also opt for acupuncture treatments to combat symptoms of withdrawal during this phase. Phase II (stabilization) lasts an average of 14 to 16 weeks, during which time patients continue counseling sessions to keep clean. They also will often continue acupuncture treatments during this phase. In Phase III (aftercare), which will often last eight to nine months, patients will begin to prepare for a drug-free future by developing necessary educational and vocational skills. If patients successfully complete the program, they may then have their criminal records either sealed or expunged.

Janet Konefal, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Miami School of Medicine in Florida, explained, "For more than 15 years, we have seen the effectiveness of using acupuncture as part of the drug court's treatment program within correctional facilities, as well as on an outpatient basis. Acupuncture has been shown to reduce anxiety to help think clearly, bring them back into emotional balance and reduce cravings."

According to Councilwoman Trachenberg, this sort of treatment program, which includes acupuncture as part of its protocol, will enhance the chances for successful recovery. "Research shows that when added to a treatment protocol, it [acupuncture] may be able to get more people to come to and stay in treatment."

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