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NIDA Initiative Will Stimulate Improvements In Drug Abuse Treatment

NIDA Director, Dr. Alan I. Leshner

Over the years, researchers have amassed an impressive amount of scientific knowledge about the treatment of drug abuse and addiction. This research has clearly shown us that drug abuse treatment can reduce drug use, criminal behavior, and the health and social costs of drug abuse and addiction.

In addition, NIDA has funded the development of several new behavioral treatments for cocaine abuse that have shown good success in clinical trials. Family therapies for adolescents, contingency management approaches, and other behavioral therapies are now ready for use in treatment programs. In addition, clinics around the Nation are using medications such as methadone and the NIDA-developed LAAM (leva-alpha-acetyl-methadol) in combination with behavioral treatments to treat heroin addicts successfully. Developing an effective medication to treat cocaine abuse continues to be a major NIDA priority, and we have a number of promising compounds in our medication pipeline.

*NIDA's comprehensive Treatment Initiative will
be the catalyst for more effective drug
abuse treatments.*

Despite advances such as these, we need to do more to reduce the ravages of drug abuse and addiction. NIDA has launched a major Treatment Initiative to further improve the effectiveness of drug abuse treatment.

wide effort is being coordinated by NIDA's Division of Clinical and Services Research. A special subcommittee of NIDA's National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse is helping us focus the Initiative's priorities. Over the course of the Treatment Initiative will increase NIDA's treatment research and dramatically expand the dissemination of information about research-proven drug abuse treatments.

To increase the usefulness of NIDA's existing base of treatment knowledge, our comprehensive Initiative includes a series of research workshops to bring together experts in different areas of treatment. These experts will evaluate current addiction treatments and determine which treatments work best and how they work. They also will recommend additional research to develop new and more potent behavioral and pharmacological therapies. Ultimately, the Initiative should expand the treatment options available to practitioners and enable them to select the right combination of treatments for their patients.

The NIDA National Advisory Council Subcommittee on the Treatment Initiative has urged increased emphasis on the development of new behavioral therapies, the transfer of effective behavioral therapies into practice, and the development of new pharmacological and behavioral treatments for methamphetamine abuse. The Initiative will address the first two of these priorities with a series of workshops on practical issues involved in behavioral therapy development and application. And, to meet the challenge of methamphetamine abuse, NIDA has called for increased research to develop medications to treat abuse of psychomotor stimulants other than cocaine, particularly methamphetamine.

The Treatment Initiative also will expand health services research to get a clearer picture of how the organization, management, and financing of drug abuse treatment affect its accessibility, availability, costs, and results. This will enable us to evaluate and further improve the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of drug abuse treatment in the real world. In turn, these data will help us to respond successfully to ongoing changes in the delivery and financing of drug abuse care. We have already begun this process by issuing a new Request for Applications to encourage additional health services research in these areas.

The Initiative will launch extensive information dissemination activities to address directly what I consider the greatest barrier to improving drug abuse treatment today - a general disbelief in the effectiveness of drug abuse treatment. I believe that this "great disconnect" between public perceptions and what science has shown is clearly treatable - stems from general ignorance about these findings. Simply put, the public lacks knowledge of the biological and behavioral changes wrought by drug abuse and addiction and the success of treatment in reversing these changes. This lack of knowledge undermines our ability to treat this chronic, relapsing disease effectively. The Initiative will provide support for the research we need to further improve drug abuse treatment.

To bridge this disconnect, the Treatment Initiative will spread the word that we have effective drug abuse treatments that work well for many people. In addition, the conferences, research symposia, and workshops that the Initiative will sponsor over the next few years will greatly increase the flow of scientific information about drug addiction and treatment issues among researchers, policymakers, the treatment community, and the general public. For example, these constituencies will be invited to a major treatment conference next April where treatment researchers will present what we know about addiction and models of successful addiction treatment. Taken together, these coordinated activities will increase understanding of drug abuse treatment research. These activities will also demonstrate to policymakers, and public and private agencies that funding drug abuse research and treatment is well worth the investment. (For full details of activities that are being planned for the Treatment Initiative, see ["NIDA Launches Drug Abuse Treatment Initiative."](#))

The news about drug abuse treatment is good news. Many studies have shown the effectiveness of drug abuse treatments. And we have the knowledge and the tools to develop drug abuse treatments that will work even better than current treatments. We believe that NIDA's comprehensive Treatment Initiative will be the catalyst for more effective drug abuse treatments that will substantially alleviate the heavy individual, family, and societal costs and consequences of this terrible disease.

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