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NIDA Launches Drug Abuse Treatment Initiative

By **Robert Mathias**, NIDA NOTES Staff Writer

Several years ago, a NIDA-supported researcher in Vermont discovered that a new behavioral treatment cocaine abuse among mostly white rural patients. Later, when NIDA intramural and extramural research tested the same treatment with inner-city cocaine and heroin abusers, they found that it reduced their cocaine abuse. These researchers have shown that this behavioral treatment can reduce cocaine abuse among a variety of cocaine abusers in controlled clinical research studies. However, they still have more to learn. For example, how well will it work in a resource-starved neighborhood clinic? What training will treatment counselors need to use the treatment effectively? Will the new treatment be cost-effective?

How to translate promising drug abuse treatments from research into practice is one of the many critical issues to be addressed by a major Treatment Initiative NIDA has launched to improve the quality of drug abuse treatment.

The Initiative has both a research and a communications thrust. The research thrust will stimulate additional research to improve current treatments and to develop new treatments and transfer them to community-based drug abuse treatment clinics. The communications thrust will increase the exchange of useful information about drug addiction and treatment among the research and treatment communities and the general public.

"We now have a variety of effective addiction treatments as a result of our research," says NIDA Director Robert Leshner. Both behavioral and pharmacological treatments have been shown to reduce drug abuse, crime and delinquency, and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases that are associated with drug abuse. "By spurring additional drug abuse treatment research and speeding the evaluation and application of new treatments in the real world, NIDA's Treatment Initiative can have a significant impact on the Nation's public health," Leshner says.

The Treatment Initiative will spur additional drug abuse treatment research and speed the evaluation and application of research-tested treatments in the real world.

Under the research prong of the Initiative, NIDA will hold workshops to assess the current body of science about behavioral therapies, treatment medications, HIV/AIDS risk behaviors, and comprehensive treatment. The Institute also plans to solicit and support new research to meet needs identified in all of these areas through the Initiative.

Advancing the role of behavioral therapies in drug abuse treatment is a priority of the Treatment Initiative. Dr. Onken of NIDA's Division of Clinical and Services Research (DCSR). Dr. Onken is coordinating the Initiative. Stephen Zukin, who heads the Division. This fall, DCSR is holding workshops on translating the findings of behavioral science research into innovative behavioral therapies and on transferring clinically tested behavioral therapies to the community treatment setting. Two other workshops are examining adolescent treatment issues. One is on the development of more effective treatment approaches to deal with the special needs of adolescents. The other workshop is addressing how to develop early treatment strategies for adolescents and preadolescents who abuse drugs.

Advancing health services research also will be an important part of the Initiative. This year, the Initiative will hold health services workshops on:

- factors that influence patients' readiness for treatment and motivation to change. This workshop will explore alternative approaches to drug abuse treatment for patients unable or unwilling to seek help in treatment programs.
- drug abuse treatment for special populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, the homeless, persons with disabilities, and pregnant women. Unique treatment needs, potential barriers to treatment, and culturally appropriate treatment models to set research priorities to improve treatment for these populations will be issues on the agenda.
- integrating medical and mental health services and drug abuse treatment. This workshop aims to promote a system health services research by increasing communication and interaction between medical health services researchers and drug abuse treatment researchers.
- financing drug abuse treatment and services. An expert panel is convening at this workshop to develop recommendations to address both the immediate and long-term funding needs of providers of treatment.

Other Treatment Initiative research workshops on this year's agenda are designed to:

- evaluate the validity and reliability of instruments that researchers are currently using to assess whether treatment reduces AIDS risk behaviors; and
- look at ways to improve and expand the use of the heroin treatment medication naltrexone.

Under the communications thrust of the Initiative, NIDA will hold a major drug abuse treatment conference.

1998. The conference will highlight the principles of effective drug abuse treatment; detail pharmacologic and behavioral treatments that have been shown to be effective; and examine the state of current research on drug abuse in different populations. The audience for the conference will include treatment researchers, treatment providers and representatives from State drug abuse agencies and managed care organizations, and public policymakers. "We invite anyone who has an impact on treatment," said Dr. G. Alan Marlatt of the University of Washington at a recent meeting of NIDA's National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse. Dr. Marlatt serves on a Council subcommittee that is helping NIDA plan the treatment conference and focus the Treatment Initiative.

In addition to the treatment conference, NIDA plans a host of other communications activities for the In-Workshops will identify and disseminate research-based behavioral therapies.

Additional conferences will update the drug abuse treatment community on the treatment of cocaine addiction, treatment medications, and other effective drug abuse treatment and HIV prevention approaches. Treatment symposia at major national meetings will inform professionals in related fields about drug abuse treatment findings.

NIDA NOTES will provide further information about the Treatment Initiative's conferences, symposia, and other activities as details become available.

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