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Looking for a solution to a global crisis: Stigmatization of Methadone Maintenance Therapy

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Methadone maintenance therapy (MMT) starts since 1964 as a medical response to the post-World War II heroin epidemic in New York City. Methadone maintenance reduces and/or eliminates the use of heroin, reduces the death rates and criminality associated with heroin use allows patients to improve their health and social productivity and reduce the transmission of infectious diseases associated with heroin injection, such as hepatitis and HIV. The principal effects of methadone maintenance are to relieve narcotic craving, suppress the abstinence syndrome, and block the euphoric effects associated with heroin. However, stigma, discrimination and bias directed at the programs and the patients have negative effect on delivery of services. Even now, there is not better therapy for many of heroin addict patients. Patients usually reported experiencing stigma and discrimination including blame/judgment, shame, disclosure and the fear of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission by others. Unemployed patients were more likely to experience discrimination. Those who were taking an antiretroviral were more likely to disclose their health status. In addition, a higher likelihood of being blamed/

judged and shamed was associated with those who suffered from anxiety/depression. They reported that stigma resulted in lower self-esteem, relationship conflicts, reluctance to initiate, access, or continue MMT and distrust toward the health care system. Stigma and discrimination lead toward reduce the effectiveness of treatment and reduce the number of patents that wants to start MMT Voluntarily and unemployment of patients under methadone treatment as well. Public awareness campaigns, education of health care workers, family therapy, and community meetings were cited as potential stigma-reduction strategies. Professional community leadership is necessary to educate the general public if these society problems are to be overcome.

Speaker Biography

Arash Ghodousi has completed his specialty in Forensic Medicine and clinical toxicology from Tehran University of Medical science in 2003 and certified in addiction treatment from Iranian National Centre for Addiction Studies (INCAS) in 2005. Now, he is associate professor and Deputy of medical sciences in Isfahan Branch of Islamic Azad University and has a private clinic for addiction treatment.

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