



Opinion

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Pennywise and Drug Foolish: On the Financial Gain of Rehabilitating Substance Abusers

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Received Date: May 06, 2020**Published Date:** June 08, 2020**Abstract**

This opinion paper briefly discusses some of the financial incentives of ensuring adequate public funding for substance abuse treatment amidst ensuing cutbacks on treatment costs.

Keywords: Substance abuse; Drugs; Addiction; Treatment; Funding

The Cost of Substance Abuse

A 2012 UN report stated that substance abuse claims the lives of approximately 200,000 individuals each year globally [1]. In the United States alone, over 20 million people have at least one addiction, yet only 10% of them receive treatment [2,3]. The demand for substance abuse treatment is one of the largest strains on national health systems. In the US, substance abuse (illegal drugs and prescription drugs) costs taxpayers over \$200 billion a year, counting costs for widespread disability, morbidity, premature death, and diversion of economic resources to drug-related activities [4-7]. Should one alcohol and tobacco as well into the equation, the sum would skyrocket to more than \$740 billion a year and growing [8]. Meanwhile, it is estimated that if every single individual in the US who abuses substances were to receive treatment, the costs would amount to roughly \$200-\$250 billion, or 0.3-0.4% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), coincidentally much less still than the funds earned through illegal drug trade [9]. To this end, treatment is indeed cost-effective as compared to the cost of untreated and perpetuated substance abuse. Research in the US has shown that for every invested dollar in drug-related treatment, there is an approximate \$4-\$12 return in reduced crime and healthcare costs [9].

Cutbacks on Treatment Costs

At the same time, cutbacks to addiction treatment have been increasing in the Western hemisphere. For instance, in England, there has, as of 2018, been an 18% cut from treatment budgets since 2013-14 [10,11]. In Scotland, there have been budget cuts to the drug and alcohol services amounting to tens of millions of pounds over the years [12]. The US is seeing massive on-going cutbacks to its Medicaid programme, which is used to pay for much of the drug treatment in the US [13]. In Spain, several treatment centres have been under threat of closure due to budget constraints [14]. Similar developments can be seen in many other countries perpetrated by politicians of all sides of the political spectrum.

Investing in Treatment Options

Needless to say, the most effective means reducing substance abuse in society would be to ensure that people never started abusing drugs in the first place. However, while laws and drug prevention initiatives are important to stop as many youth as possible from falling victims to impending substance abuse, society must also have the capacity, and readiness, to deal with the substance abuse that exists in society at present. It is true that there is no

single universal cure/treatment method to solve any and all types addictions with guaranteed results, and will in all likelihood never be one, because the reasons behind substance abuse are always individual, as are the responses to and effects of each treatment option [15,16]. Still, there are wide arrays of different methods available, including, but not limited to, methadone, behavioural therapy, psychotherapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and many others. While all these methods are indeed costly and put strains on the public economy, the financial long-term benefits for society of drug rehabilitation should not be undermined. While it is becoming increasingly more popular for politicians to cut public spending on drug rehabilitation programmes, the proverbial act of being “pennywise and pound foolish” rings true indeed.

Conclusion

Verily, substance abuse will always entail a financial burden on society one way or another, but we can choose whether or not we want to spend a larger or a lesser amount of resources, and we can choose if we want to waste those resources or if they should be put to more productive use. For this reason, it is quintessential that the financial advantage of substance rehabilitation is accentuated in the political domain.

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Conflict of Interest

Author declare no conflict of interest.

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