Is forced therapy the solution for addiction? – addressing a global key health issue in times of the highest numbers of new psychoactive drugs

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Introduction: Addiction is one of the key global health problems. Worldwide there are approximately 149 to 271 million people who use amphetamine, cannabis, cocaine or opioids. Precise numbers on prevalence of addiction are difficult to obtain as measurements methods are indirect and surveys depend on information provided by consumers. To face that problem a variety of approaches have been implemented in Europe.

Objectives: The presentation takes into account the diversity and classification of addiction related disorders in Europe focusing on the most consumed legal drug alcohol and the most consumed illicit drug, cannabis.

Methods: Definitions, prevalence, evidence for the effectiveness of interventions and legal issues will be on focus and the audience will be updated on characteristics of the newest psychoactive substances.

Results: Around two new psychoactive substances are discovered per week in Europe as published by the EU drugs agency EMCDDA in March 2015. The figures are the highest measured showing an upward trend. Results show that semi-compulsory therapy in addiction for convicts are as effective as voluntary treatment. Especially regarding cannabis the European area has controversial approaches from a different legal point of view. Some countries differentiate “soft” drugs (such as cannabis) from “hard” drugs (such as heroin and cocaine). Softening or aggravation of penalties does not show a direct association with prevalence.

Discussion and Conclusions: The diversity in psychoactive substances increases to a frightening extent. On top of that new psychoactive substances are difficult to detect by traditionally drug tests. Despite of recent revisions there is an ongoing need for updating addiction related classification systems such as in DSM and ICD. Quasi-compulsory therapy shows effects. Harsher penalties do not show a unidirectional relationship with prevalence.

Supplementary material: Complete presentation available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org