From Compulsory Detoxification to Community-based Rehabilitation: Building an integrated model for relapse reduction and HIV prevention among drug users in Southwest China

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BACKGROUND

China has traditionally tackled drug dependence with forced detention of IDUs in compulsory detoxification centers run by China’s Public Security Bureau. These detox centers provide inmates with virtually no access to essential HIV and HCV prevention services and information. This lack of access has perpetuated a cycle of relapse, arrest and detention for many IDUs.

PSI/China works in Yunnan Province, which has the highest HIV prevalence in China. Injecting drug use is the primary mode of HIV transmission (39% of HIV cases) and the population of 80,000 registered IDUs has an HIV prevalence of 72%. At any given moment, around one third of registered IDUs in Yunnan Province are detained in detoxification centers.

In 2008, a new narcotics control law was passed transferring control of their health and support one another towards rehabilitation. This model actively demonstrates how the 2008 law’s provision for community-based rehabilitation can be implemented successfully.

Comprehensive Package of Services. Our model offers IDUs a comprehensive package of psychosocial support and health services through peer educators and robust referral networks. Psychosocial support includes peer counseling for IDUs and their families, a Narcotics Anonymous support group and legal counseling. Health services provided include HIV counseling and testing, basic health and sexually transmitted infection (STI) screenings, and methadone maintenance treatment (MMT) adherence support. PSI also provides seamless linkages to governmental and non-governmental providers for services including MMT, HIV follow-up testing and treatment, STI diagnosis and treatment, and needle/syringe distribution programs.

Peer-led, Community-based. PSI/China’s rehabilitation model is led by peer educators who provide IDUs services in drop-in centers and in the communities where they live. This community-based rehabilitation model empowers IDUs and peer educators to take control of their health and support one another towards rehabilitation.

INTERVENTION MODEL

Huxianghao (“Good for you, good for me”)

Breaking the Cycle. The Huxianghao model breaks the cycle of relapse, arrest and detention by offering IDUs a comprehensive package of support and services that enable them to avoid relapse, deal with relapse if it occurs, and reintegrate into their communities. This model actively demonstrates how the 2008 law’s provision for community-based rehabilitation can be implemented successfully.

Peer educators often escort IDUs to these services to provide moral support.

Peers - Community-based. PSI/China’s rehabilitation model is led by peer educators who provide IDUs services in drop-in centers and in the communities where they live. PSI/China ensures IDUs in the centers receive HIV prevention education they would not otherwise access. Upon their release, PSI/China reaches out to detox center inmates, providing them with skills for safer behavior, advice for successful reintegration into their communities, and linkages to supportive services upon their release. By providing this education, PSI/China ensures IDUs in the centers receive HIV prevention education they would not otherwise access. Upon their release, PSI/China ensures IDUs community-based support on their continuing path to recovery.

Huxianghao offers a working model for community detoxification and rehabilitation and will continue to be a key tool in promoting the implementation of a comprehensive, peer-based approach to the rehabilitation of IDUs.

RESULTS

Since October 2006:
- 43,296 IDUs reached via the community-based rehabilitation model. This includes educational activities, peer support, and community outreach.
- 60% of our 1,479 drop-in center clients receive MMT compared to a Yunnan provincial average of 11% of IDUs;
- 3 IDU grassroots groups founded and led by individuals who participated in PSI/China’s peer educator program. These grassroots groups mark a major step toward moving rehabilitation out of the centers and into the community.
- 11 communities utilizing PSI/China technical assistance to build community-based rehabilitation programs according to the Huxianghao model

When we see PSI peer educators, whether in the detox centers or during outreach, we see hope and inspiration. We can choose to be like them, to live like human beings again and be able to help others.” – Former IDU turned grassroots leader

Reaching out in Detox Centers. PSI/China reaches out to detox center inmates, providing them with skills for safer behavior, advice for successful reintegration into their communities, and linkages to supportive services upon their release. By providing this education, PSI/China ensures IDUs in the centers receive HIV prevention education they would not otherwise access. Upon their release, Huxianghao provides IDU community-based support on their continuing path to recovery.