

METH UPDATE

Crime, Compassion, and Recovery

Another study arrived in the Strike force in-basket. It was conducted by RTI international, a health research institute connected to the University of North Carolina. The study was additional confirmation for treatment being more cost effective than prison, as well as having less recidivism.

A local citizen who had read the previous Meth Update commented that his compassion meter was currently reading empty. It seems his house had been recently robbed of many expensive items that were acquired through hard work, which raises the question, "Should drug use be considered an excuse for other crimes?" On the one hand criminal behavior can be a symptom of the disease, on the other, how much should John Q. Public be expected to tolerate. Restitution is reasonable, as is separating dangerous people from the population. But if the person is to be released at some time it also makes sense that he or she is maintained in a humane environment. Turning menaces into monsters that will one day return to walk among us makes no sense. Perhaps in most cases other crimes should be treated independently from drug crimes. A person might be sentenced to jail time for the burglary, and treatment for the addiction that took him there.

Flexibility can be utilized to ensure that a good program has a positive outcome. Some of the symptoms of meth use relate to the overpowering nature of the relationship a person has with the drug, and the mind altering affects of the drug. In a recent interview with singer/songwriter Billy Joel on CNN he commented that he wasn't drinking out of the bottle, it was drinking out of him. When we are consumed by a drug the results often include child neglect/endangerment, and one or more forms of domestic violence. However, these characteristics may vanish with the cessation of drug use and the working of a recovery program. If they do not it makes sense to mandate an affordable program.

An area of controversy in our local system of rehabilitation remains that all too often a recovering person is mandated to an unaffordable DV or child endangerment class. At the recent meth conference the presenter had a simple formula that is the foundation of his entire treatment theory: Stress = Craving = Relapse. The formula is backed by neuroscience and the question arises, "Are unaffordable programs the cause of stress that leads to relapse." If so, is this a fixable glitch in our quest to raise the bar on the rates of successful recovery in Butte County? A subtle shift in procedure could be to take a wait and see approach to the assignment of these programs. Why would we treat a symptom that no longer exists? The belief has been expressed by many local treatment providers that financial stressors become the straw that breaks recovery's back, and another formula comes to mind: Stress = Relapse = A return to criminal behavior.

These opinions are expressed by a member of our diverse Meth Strike force. They are submitted with the permission (not consensus) of the group at large. There may be opposing opinions expressed in the future.