

## Drug Abuse Treatment - The DAIRRC Perspective

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### Perspective

Volume 2 Issue 1

**Received Date:** February 06, 2019

**Published Date:** February 27, 2019

### Abstract

The paper addresses the issue of Drug Addiction treatment, from a holistic perspective, examines some misconceptions, and briefly outlines the DAIRRC treatment plan as a viable option. It discusses the some of the errors in earlier treatment methods of Substance Abuse Treatment, it emphasizes the fact that Substance Abusers are mostly intelligent and highly perceptive individuals, who have difficulty in dealing with the intensity of their emotions. It provides the basis of the DAIRRC treatment program, and elaborates on why the DAIRRC treatment process lasts for about ten to twelve months for the simple reason, that, treatment must last long enough to produce stable behavioral changes.

This was an attempt to make the authorities to understand the fact that a drug addict is powerless before his/her addiction, and needs to be treated instead of being punished.

There have been major changes since those days, with regards to how drug addicts are perceived, but on the whole even today, drug addiction is still considered a stigma. A whole lot more still needs to be done.

Dr. Yusuf Merchant is the founder-President of Drug Abuse Information, Rehabilitation and Research Centre, (DAIRRC) which is India's premier institution involved in the fight against psychiatric disorders including Substance Abuse since 1983. DAIRRC activities encompass all areas involved in the Prevention, Identification, Cure, Rehabilitation and Research of Substance Abuse and Depression. DAIRRC is committed to substance abuse prevention strategies, including treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts, implementation of drug demand reduction strategies, and research in the causes and effects of Substance Abuse and depression. DAIRRC has Special Consultative Status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council.

It was way back, in the early Eighties, when as a medical intern, Dr. Yusuf Merchant was witness to the ways in which drug addicts were subjected to extremely harsh and cruel treatment techniques in many hospitals and rehab centres. This was primarily due to lack of any comprehension on the subject of Substance Abuse addiction treatment.

After attending to scores of drug addicts, and participating in their drug withdrawal management, Dr. Merchant had begun to develop insights into the problem, which was totally at odds with the prescribed methods of treatment at that time. He had already realised that he

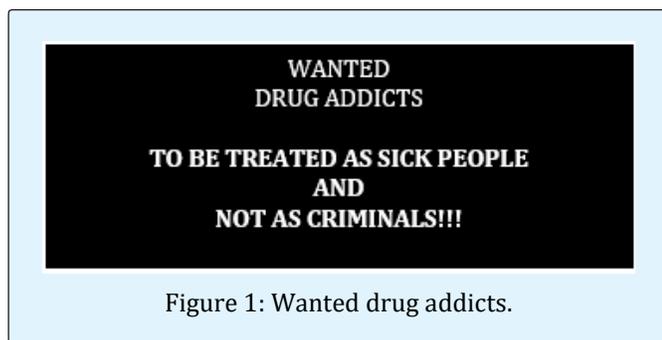


Figure 1: Wanted drug addicts.

The above advertisement had been published by Dr. Yusuf Merchant in national Indian newspapers during the nineties, amongst several other attempts, in order to draw attention to the plight of helpless heroin addicts in Bombay who were being rounded up, beaten mercilessly, punished and imprisoned, simply for being in possession of small amounts of heroin and/or their associated paraphernalia.

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had a lot in common with these addicts, with regards to their personalities and compulsive behavioural traits, the only difference being that he had managed to channelize his addictive energies towards constructive objectives, instead of seeking solace in mind altering substances.

But one of the incidents that jolted him out of his reverie, and prodded him into actually doing something about the issue, was when a heroin addict, under General anaesthesia and having been administered Electroconvulsive Therapy (one of the preferred treatments methods, at the time, for severe heroin addiction) plaintively groaned out to him, in a slurred voice laced with pain "Doc, it hurts like hell!!!! You said it wouldn't!!!!". Till date that addict's sad, helpless and accusatory face haunts him, and that cry of pain is something that Dr. Merchant can never forget.

Soon after that, Dr. Merchant quit his job at the hospital, as he found it difficult to be a participant in these inhumane methods, and commenced treating drug addicts from his residence, as per his understanding of their needs, and DAIRRC was formed. The process which started with the successful treatment and rehabilitation of one addict, has till date managed the recovery of thousands of addicts, alcoholics, persons with depression and other neuroses, has transcended international borders and brought hope and succour to numerous families around the world.

What follows are some of Dr. Merchant's insights and experience in the treatment and recovery of drug addicts, and a brief idea of the DAIRRC treatment process.

A drug addict is not a mental case or a retard, although their behaviour at times, may lead people to believe so. Most drug addicts are exceptionally intelligent human beings. They are extremely sensitive, their feelings (sensory and emotional) are more intense than others. It is their difficulty and inability to handle the intensity of their feelings, that makes them predisposed to seek solace in mind altering substances. Their basic problem is their inability to accept their individual reality, and addictive behavioural patterns are primarily attempting to temporarily alter the perception of their reality.

At DAIRRC, we believe that any chemical dependency or addictive pattern is a behavioral disorder and one needs to change her/ his behavior. Alcoholics/Addicts have a low boredom threshold or a low stress threshold. The treatment lies in working at the roots of the alcoholic/addict's problem. Alcoholics/Addicts may think, that once they go through the withdrawals, all will be fine.

This is not so. They have to develop coping skills that will help them to lead a normal and productive drug free life.

It's very easy to stop whichever alcohol/drug. You don't even need any rehabilitation program to stop alcohol/drugs. You need the rehabilitation program to STAY STOPPED FROM ALCOHOL/DRUGS. Giving up alcohol/drugs is easy, staying away needs a lot of change.

DAIRRC has been providing a holistic treatment process aimed at targeting all angles of substance and alcohol abuse, and has over a period of 35 years, now achieved a success percentage ratio of 85% (not including the dropouts).

Drug addiction has well-recognized cognitive, behavioral, and physiological characteristics that contribute to continued use of drugs, by the addict, despite the harmful consequences. It has been scientifically proved that chronic drug abuse alters the brain's anatomy and chemistry and that these changes can last for months or years after the individual has stopped using drugs. This transformation may help explain why addicts are at a high risk of relapse to drug abuse even after long periods of abstinence, and why they persist in seeking drugs despite deleterious consequences and necessarily need long term treatment.

The DAIRRC treatment process lasts for about ten to twelve months for the simple reason, that, treatment must last long enough to produce stable behavioral changes.

### DAIRRC Drug Treatment Plan for Drug Addicts/Alcoholics - (One-year in-house program)

**Note:** We refer to our patients as students. The duration of the program differs from student to student, but generally takes between ten to twelve months.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Month

Medical and psychological screening, assessment and referral for structured drug treatment. Detoxification of the student of his/her drug of choice, using medication, for a period of 2 to 4 weeks.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Month

From the second month onwards, till the end of their program, the students at the DAIRRC center are prescribed and gently guided to follow a fixed schedule

for the entire day. This schedule helps them to regulate their sleep hours, their meals, their personal hygiene, their physical activity, their leisure hours, their prayers, their personal introspection and their social interaction, in order to introduce development on all 4 planes, viz. physical, mental, social and spiritual.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Month

Once the students adapt themselves to the discipline of the center, they are then guided to address the reasons that led them to use drugs in the first place. They learn to identify their character defects, like procrastination, intolerance, impatience, fear of rejection, fear of failure, grandiosity, self-pity, low self-esteem; just to state a few.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Month

Around this time, the students have reached a stage of relative recovery from the physiological and psychological damage caused by substance abuse. After identification of their individual character traits, the students at the DAIRRC center, are then provided with short term and long-term plans to alter their behavioral patterns. The process differs from student to student, and each is provided with his/her own unique development plan, and advised to work on it.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Month

The students now begin to visit the homes and 'live in' for about a few days with former recovering students who are already integrated into the main stream of society. They are accompanied during these visits, by a senior member of the center, who guides and counsels them. At no time are they left alone.

## 6<sup>th</sup> Month

After gauging the comfort levels of the students with immediate members of their families, the parents/family members are encouraged to visit the student at the center and participate in the recovery process. The family stays at the center, and through active participation, in the treatment process, gets to understand the dynamics involved, and this in turn facilitates a comprehensive healing and 'bonding' with the students.

## 7<sup>th</sup> Month

At this stage of their recovery, the students are thoroughly prepared, and then begin to make a series of visits to their own homes, and former environments, in their individual countries, duly accompanied by a senior

member from the center. This is done in order to evaluate their actual progress and to identify their 'areas of deficiency'.

## 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Month

The students return to the center and work on their specific failings and weak areas. They are now encouraged to develop plans for their eventual return to mainstream society. This is done in collaboration with their family, and the student now allocates a fixed amount of time on a daily basis, towards actualizing his/her individual goals.

## 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> Month

The students now begin living out of the center, alone, for specific periods. This is alternated with visits to the rehab, to iron out the remaining wrinkles. If there are no signs of relapse and the counselor-in-charge feels that the students have developed apt skills to deal with themselves and their reality, the students are allowed to return to their homes.

They continue to attend follow-up meetings, conducted at regular intervals, at ex-students' residences, till such time they settle down comfortably in their individual routines.

The above is a general idea of the DAIRRC treatment process. More details can be obtained at the following links:

[www.dairrc.com](http://www.dairrc.com)

or

<http://www.hopeconference.org/rehab.htm>

## Conclusion

The DAIRRC treatment plan does not rely on chemical alternatives to induce recovery from Substance Abuse. It is based on the premise that any chemical dependency or addictive pattern is a behavioral disorder and one needs to change her/ his behavior. By introducing development on all 4 planes, viz. physical, mental, social and spiritual, in an environment of affection, respect and trust it has successfully shown that any form of addictive dependency can be effectively rehabilitated.

