

President Yanukovych

Government of Ukraine

February 25, 2011

Dear President Yanukovych,

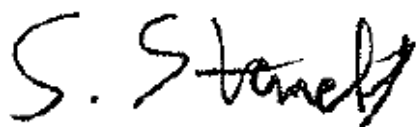
We are an international group of physicians from over 33 countries who work with drug users and who are concerned about drug policy. We are writing to express our concern about support for methadone in Ukraine. We understand that provision of methadone has been a vital tool in the control of HIV/AIDS and we applaud the fact that there are already 6,000 patients being treated with this medication.

The World Health Organization has included methadone on the list of Essential Medications for many reasons. Patients on methadone are significantly less likely to become HIV infected and methadone is a key support in helping opioid addicted patients in taking their medications (Vlahov). Methadone also reduces the risk of overdose. There are significant gains for the general population as the transmission of HIV is reduced, crime related to drug use is reduced and family relationships are restored. While some people who are addicted to opioids are able to achieve abstinence without medication many years of experience have shown that many need long-term medication in order to remain healthy, similar to HIV or diabetes which medicine can treat but not cure. This lesson has been learned in many countries, we hope that Ukraine will continue to benefit from the experience of many.

Methadone and/or buprenorphine are available for the treatment of opioid addiction in over 70 countries on 6 continents including a diversity of countries such as the Czech Republic, Iran, Australia, and most recently the Republic of Tanzania (Mathers). Not only has it been available in the United States for over 40 years it is supported by the U.S President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) which has recognized the role of methadone in the prevention of HIV as well as in the care of HIV positive patients.

We urge the Ukrainian Government to renew support for methadone maintenance and to continue to expand access to this vital medication. It not only plays a key role in prevention of HIV but it has the potential to restore many Ukrainians to fulfilling and productive lives.

Sincerely,



Dr Sharon Stancliff of behalf of International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (IDHDP)

cc

Ministry of Health, Ukraine

Andriy Klepikov, □ Executive Director, International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine □

Christian Kroll, Global Coordinator for HIV/AIDS, UNODC.

Yury Fedotov, Executive Director, UNODC

Rich Needle, PEPFAR

Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch, Director, Global Drug Policy Program Open Society Foundations

IHRA

EHRA

References

Mathers B, Degenhardt L, Ali H *et al.* and for the 2009 Reference Group to the UN on HIV and Injecting Drug Use, HIV prevention, treatment, and care services for people who inject drugs: a systematic review of global, regional, and national coverage, *Lancet* (2010)

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Vlahov D, Robertson AM, Strathdee SA. HIV prevention among injection drug users in resource-limited settings. *Clin Infect Dis.* 2010; 15;50(S3):S114-S121

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PEPFAR Comprehensive HIV Prevention for People Who Inject Drugs, Revised Guidance The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief July 2010

www.pepfar.gov/documents/organization/144970.pdf

WHO Model List of Essential Medicines

<http://www.who.int/medicines/publications/essentialmedicines/en/index.html>