

June 22, 2004

Deb Weekes
Eastern Regional Manager
Ontario Addiction Treatment Centers
27 William Street, North
Lindsay, ON K9V 3Z9

The Sandy Hill Community Health Centre welcomes and supports the opening of the Ontario Addictions Treatment Centre's new Methadone Clinic.

The City of Ottawa is currently under serviced for methadone treatment. The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Mental Health & Addictions Branch, estimates that presently only 19% of the service needs for opiate addicts are being met. The new methadone clinic will increase the access to Methadone Treatment Programs for opiate addicts living in Ottawa.

We believe that methadone programs are an essential component of a continuum of addictions support and primary health care services that minimize the harm associated with drug use. More importantly however, we believe this program provides people with the opportunity to gain control of their addictive behaviours and to contribute meaningfully to society.

Maybe in a perfect world people wouldn't use drugs. Maybe in the perfect world people wouldn't suffer the pain that drives some to take their first shot. Abstinence has been the hallmark of addictions treatment for decades. It is the keystone of Alcoholics Anonymous and many other popular treatment programs. However, abstinence doesn't work for everyone. The harm reduction approach recognizes that we don't live in a perfect world, but in the real world, we can still do a lot to reduce the damage without forcing people to stop using before we help. Harm reduction promotes the development of productive relationships between health professionals and people with addictions.

Methadone was one of the first tactics used for harm reduction for Intravenous drug users (IDUs). Methadone is a long-acting opiate that relieves the cravings for heroin without delivering its high. Taking methadone in the morning permits addicts to get on with their lives without worrying about where they will find their next fix. We know Methadone works. It markedly increases compliance with treatment, decreases the use of illegal drugs, and reduces mortality. Under epidemic conditions, methadone therapy can avert five to seven HIV infections

for every hundred persons on therapy. (AIDS, 1999; 13:1807-1818). More importantly, we know that methadone treatment allows people to get off the treadmill on the street and start dealing with their problems.

The openness and commitment made by Dr Daiter to work in collaboration and partnership with community organisations is particularly welcomed and strongly supported by SHCHC.

All people, no matter how criminalized and hated, deserve a chance to live, and a chance to make a better life for themselves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Gibson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "G".

David Gibson, Executive Director
Sandy Hill Community Health Centre

Cc Nancy Knudsen, Director, Health Services
Yvon Lemire, Director, Addictions & Problem Gambling Services of Ottawa
Robin McAndrew, Director, Community Health Promotion
Rob Boyd, Director, Oasis Program