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18. Methadone Treatment as a Harm Reduction Method for Reducing the Incidence of HIV transmission in Malaysia: A Comparative Paradigm
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METHADONE TREATMENT AS A HARM REDUCTION METHOD FOR REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV TRANSMISSION IN MALAYSIA: A COMPARATIVE PARADIGM

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Introduction

Globally, there are currently 42 Million people infected with HIV. So far, since the discovery of the AIDS (Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome) virus in the early 1980s, another 12 Million have died of AIDS. In Malaysia, there are 51,000 people who currently have HIV, and a further 5,400 have died since 1986. The majority of these people are Malay-Muslims. About 76% of people with HIV in Malaysia are 'Intravenous Drug Users' (IDUs) who have contracted the virus from contaminated needles and syringes. In Malaysia, the main drug that is injected is Heroin, although a significant minority inject Morphine. Both Heroin and Morphine belong to a class of drugs known as Opiates as they are derived from the drug Opium. Opiate substitution involves prescribing a synthetic opiate for the drug user to take instead of Heroin or Morphine.

This article will discuss one method of ‘Harm Reduction’ designed to reduce the incidence of HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus) transmission among drug users who use hypodermic needles. The general term for the method in question is ‘opiate substitution.’ As the most widely used substitute opiate is Methadone, this article will concentrate on the legal position regarding ‘methadone treatment’ in Malaysia. The rationale behind the concept of ‘harm reduction,’ vis-a-vis IDUs and HIV is demonstrated by the following model:

a. - ‘Cleaning shared injecting equipment.’

b. - ‘Stopping the sharing of injection equipment.’

c. - ‘Reducing the frequency of injection.’

d. - ‘Stopping injecting drug use.’

e. - ‘Reducing the frequency of non-injecting drug use.’

f. - ‘Stopping non-injecting drug use.’

The idea is that a drug user will move in stages from the above action (a) to action (f). As it is thought to be almost impossible for someone carrying out