

More Straight Talk

Eve Zibert's Jan. 2 article about the Straight, Inc., drug abuse treatment program unfortunately focused on the controversy associated with the program, rather than on its successes.

During the last 13 years, I have worked in, visited and evaluated drug abuse treatment programs, not only in the Washington area, but throughout the nation and in many foreign countries. Many programs talk of helping the "young," but few genuinely deal with teen-agers. The typical drug abuse treatment patient in America today is about 30 years old.

In fact, prior to the development of the Straight program, there was no practical model for the treatment of the adolescent drug abuser, since the widely used methadone treatment, therapeutic communities and once-a-week outpatient techniques were all inappropriate for this age group. There was one other limitation to earlier drug abuse treatment programs that limited their relevance in the 1980s: they relied primarily, and often exclusively, on government funding.

Straight has solved these problems by using a self-help, family-based technique of high intensity and relatively short duration. The program

is effective, and it is affordable for all.

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(The writer was formerly director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.)

The letter Jan. 6 from William B. Weitzel of Port Allegany, Pa., regarding the story on Straight, Inc., reflects a misunderstanding on two main points:

First, as the article itself said, the patient's family is required to participate, first through extensive interviews, then through open meetings twice a week and ultimately as a "foster family" to other drug abusers. Family therapy is essential because "chemical dependency is a family disease. A kid gets into drugs and starts acting crazy, everyone has to react to that." In fact, one of the major reasons for Straight's success is its strong emphasis on total family involvement.

Second, the comparison between the Straight and Alcoholics Anonymous programs arises from the fact that Straight's seven steps for personal change, which form the core of the entire treatment program, are a slightly simplified version of the 12 steps of AA, adapted for adolescent patients.

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