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A qualitative study on relapse management experiences among peer group counselors for opiate dependence

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Background: About seventy-two thousands addicts are admitted in abstinence based opiate addiction treatment program in Iran by a large non-governmental network of centers managed by ex-addicts each year. Relapse to drug use during post detoxification abstinence is a significant impediment in the treatment of opiate dependence. In absence of structured relapse prevention programs, recovered addicts are supported by peer groups and 12-step weekly meetings with some informal non structured interventions. Understanding relapse and the relapse management experiences among peer group counselors for opiate-dependence and providing materials for development of a more comprehensive after-discharge relapse prevention and intervention program are the aims of this inquiry.

Methods: 23 opiate-dependent ex-addicts in 2 groups participated in 11 FGD meetings. Participants were abstinent for more than 2 years and sponsors of new-comers in short term residential care and 12-step programs (Peer Group Counselors or PGCs). In the meetings, participants brainstormed about two broad topic areas; relapse reasons and peer counselors interventions in lapse cases.

Results: Relapse reasons categorized to treatment program, individual, family and social factors. Psycho-emotional supports, motivating for continuing treatment program, encouraging studying recent lapse cognitively were done by peer counselors in cases of other's lapses. Peer counselors offer clients to commit to treatment program in lapse cases and support them emotionally.

Conclusion: Developing a RP program, peer group experiences would be essential. In spite of new-comers social reintegration difficulties, peer counselors almost ignored social and community reasons and emphasized on family and personal reasons of relapse.

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