Reviewer's report

Title: Social integration of patients in long-term maintenance treatment in northern Italy

Version: 1 Date: 12 December 2005

Reviewer: fabrizio schifano

Reviewer's report:

In general, the usefulness of this paper is due to the fact that it describes the characteristics of a fairly large sample of opiate addicts (chronically maintained with opiate agonists), from the northern-eastern part of Italy. However:

1. I am not sure that it is appropriate to compare from the statistical point of view the findings of this paper with the data from Italy in general or from northern Italy in particular;

2. a few issues (i.e.: different prevalence rates of HIV in females with respect to males; females having more frequently partners with history of drug addiction- sometimes referred to as 'the Samo syndrome', and so on) need to be commented in detail because these are just the most important components of this paper;

3. the Authors state that a 12.5% prevalence rate of HIV in their sample is 'modest'. I do disagree: this rate is probably lower than what observed in Spain and Portugal, but it is incredibly higher than what observed in other EU conutries (i.e.: UK);

4. the Authors state (summary; end of the discussion section) that '...The combination of effective treatment and a setting of economic prosperity may enhance social integration of persons with history of heroin use.' No proof is given here of the validity of this statement and this is just an hypothesis;

5. instead of 'Public Health Centres for Drug Users (PHCDUs)' I would define their services as 'NHS drug addiction units';

6. '....Nonetheless, it is the general opinion of the personnel in treatment centres that patients have higher levels of employment today than in the past. This could be the result of the different approach to methadone treatment compared to the past, with higher doses and easier access to methadone, for example by supplying one or more weeks of methadone take-home doses' This is just an hypothesis which is not supported at all by the data here presented.

Conclusion: Major Compulsory Revision (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'

f schifano