

The Issue

Adolescents who have an addictive disorder represent a troubling and complex public health challenge for families, communities, schools, and Addiction Professionals who serve this population.

School drug testing has been implemented as a means of combating addictive disorders among adolescents, whereas NAADAC questions the benefits and efficacy of such a strategy. The challenges become exceedingly difficult to test, in that Addiction Professionals have to assess what to test for, what safeguards there are against false-testing processes, how the privacy of a student's health status is protected, and whether dropout rates would soar as a result of this type of examination.

Such challenges beg the question of whether healthcare settings are more appropriate and better-equipped venues to conduct screenings or assessments of this kind, and even whether widespread school-based drug-testing itself is the most prudent use of funds for addressing Addictive Disorder issues among adolescents.

Addiction Professionals specializing in adolescent care possess expertise and skill sets that are highly relevant to working with adolescents and their families, teachers, nurses, and guidance counselors to address addictive disorders that are identified in the schools.

These skills sets and expertise apply not only to intensive treatment but also to prevention and early intervention. Training includes, but is not limited to, addictive disorder detection, as well as a firm knowledge base of how addictive disorders differ in the adolescent vs. the adult population.

It should be stressed that NAADAC asserts that there should be a single point of contact for referrals (e.g. guidance counselor, school nurse, vice principal, or student assistance program coordinator) to issue referrals. However, it is worth noting that a school's referral is useful only to the extent that resources are available to ensure care – regardless of health insurance status, parental income, or the capacity of the community's adolescent programs.

NAADAC stresses that drug testing initiatives should only be used as a component of an assessment plan but in light of the shortage of adolescent prevention and treatment workforce training for Addiction Professionals who can adequately meet the need to deal effectively with

this population. It is clear though that there is a need for more research information in order to design innovative treatment modalities specifically for adolescents.

Federal support for an enhanced Addiction Professional workforce treating adolescents is warranted when one examines the national trends, statistics, and other factors that indicate a growing need to support these professionals through better training, research, and data collection on adolescent related issues.

Steps toward Implementation

Stakeholders should first ensure that sufficient resources are available to address students who test positive. These resources should include immediate access to Addiction Professionals, as well as comprehensive treatment programs for students with serious addictive disorders.

The referral process that will guide the student to the Addiction Professional needs to be a clear one. Currently, consensus among Addiction Professionals is that the referral process is too complex and bureaucratic, ultimately working against the interest of the adolescent.

Adolescent drug testing should be used solely as a means of treatment and evaluation and not as a punitive action.

School administrators need to be fully aware of an Addiction Professional's scope of expertise in order to realize the maximum benefit from a relationship within their school programs.

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