

PRESS BRIEF

AIIMS, New Delhi launches India's first ever Mobile Methadone Dispensing Van

The National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), AIIMS has initiated a new service – delivery of methadone through a mobile van in East Delhi. The new service delivery was inaugurated by the AIIMS Director, Prof. Randeep Guleria on 22 March 2019 in the presence of officers from National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Director General Health Services, Govt. of Delhi. Representatives from NGOs, and drug user community also attended the inauguration event.

Opioid Addiction is a significant problem in India. The recently released report of National Survey last month estimated that India has about 28 Lakh people affected by addiction to opioids such as heroin, opium and various pharmaceutical products. These people require medicines such as methadone or buprenorphine for treatment of opioid addiction. However, there are very few treatment centres providing these medicines, while the need is very high. It is estimated that less than two percent of the population addicted to opioids in India is receiving this treatment, which is recommended by various UN bodies and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Since methadone is a highly regulated medicine it is only provided as daily observed treatment. This medicine is available in just about a dozen cities in India. “Patients often find it difficult to come to the clinic daily to receive methadone, which leads to patients dropping-out of treatment midway”, informed Dr. Ravindra Rao, in-charge of the methadone clinic. The mobile methadone dispensing unit plans to bridge this gap and improve retention of patients into treatment enabling them to work and lead a healthier life. Currently, such dispensing vans or buses are available in few select developed countries in the world, such as USA, Portugal, Spain, Canada and Netherlands. With the launch of mobile delivery of methadone, India joins this elite club. In fact, India is the first country in the South Asian Region to initiate these services.

The van will be parked at strategic places in East Delhi and adjoining areas for fixed time period in the day, where the patients can come and receive their medicine without having to travel to the main clinic. “In the trial run for last two weeks we already have more than two dozen patients enrolled in the facility and the response is very encouraging” informed Dr. Rao. This number is expected to reach about 100 patients per day, very soon. Based on the success of this initiative, this new approach can be scaled-up in different parts of the country.



(Director, AIIMS dispensing methadone at the mobile dispensing van)



(Prof Randeep Guleria, Director, AIIMS, New Delhi along with dignitaries from UNODC-ROSA, NACO, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and representative from the Drug Users Forum on the occasion of formal inauguration of services on 22.03.2019)

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