



A WORD IN YOUR EAR

International Day Against Drug Abuse

26th June is the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. What does this have to do with you? As healthcare pro-

professionals, you need to be aware of the problems of drug abuse. You need to be able to recognise the signs, and to refer patients to the appropriate people for health. It's also particularly important that you should be aware of which medicines have dependence-producing potential.

The World Health Organisation has this to say about substance dependence:

"Substance dependence is a chronic and relapsing behavioural disorder, caused by repeated and often prolonged and/or heavy use of psychoactive substances. It is characterised by the continued use of these substances despite physical and mental problems, strong desire to take the substance(s), difficulties in controlling substance use, neglect of other activities and interests in favour of using or seeking the drug, increased tolerance and sometimes a withdrawal syndrome once drug use is abruptly ceased.

"Dependence is not the result of the lack of will power or moral weakness. Often, complete abstinence cannot be easily achieved and therefore treatment must include effective ways of decreasing morbidity and mortality related to substance use, and increasing the quality of life of the patient until he/she can achieve the ultimate goal of a drug free life. Currently, effective treatments do exist and need to be widely used to achieve these goals."

I know that many pharmacist's assistants have trained as Drug Wise counsellors. If you haven't done so, it would be a good idea to contact Drug Wise and find out about their training programmes. If you phone (011) 483-3881, you will be able to get information on training, as well as information on how to go about

referring someone for the correct counselling.

What else can you do? I know that pharmacist's assistants have been very involved in Pharmacy Week activities, and perhaps 26th June is a good opportunity for assistants to raise awareness of substance abuse in their communities. If you do decide to do something, like making posters or pamphlets to hand out, please take photographs and write to *SAPA* about it.

Impaired professionals

Unfortunately, it isn't only the people we come into contact with who might have problems with dependence. It may be you or me or the pharmacists we work with. It may be the medical practitioners or the nursing staff. What should we do when we become aware of the problem? Obviously, it needs to be dealt with in the correct way.

One of the problems, of course, is that most people need support in order to deal with a predicament like this. It isn't easy to do it alone. In fact, I very much doubt that it is possible. If you, as a pharmacist's assistant, have a problem with dependence on a substance, whether it is alcohol, an illegal substance or a scheduled medicine, who can you turn to?

One of the options available is for you to turn to the Pharmacy Council's Health Committee. It isn't there to judge your actions. It's there to help you to find the correct help, and to give you support and someone to turn to.

If you have a problem like this, don't ignore it. It won't always go away on its own. Ask for help. It may save your life.

Issues facing pharmacist's assistants

Thanks, once again, to Sergie Raju for his comprehensive assessment of the issues faced on a daily basis. It's obvious that we still need to work together to find answers to the problems. It's equally obvious that not all assistants are desperately unhappy – thank goodness there are some who have job satisfaction and recognition. At least that means that it's possible to achieve these. Let me know your success stories, and I'll gladly publish them.

Lorraine Osman