

Training on Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST) in South Africa

Mainline initiated a training on Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST) in October 2016. The training was held in Pretoria, South Africa. In many countries, access to opioid substitutes such as methadone and buprenorphine is difficult or even impossible.

Yet, Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST) is a proven effective element of the harm reduction package. It greatly reduces or eliminates the need to inject, bringing down the risk of contracting HIV or hepatitis. Moreover, for many it brings stability and enhances their quality of life.

On the other hand, the expectations of methadone are often high. Are these expectations always justified? Will it help build up a new life or will it lead to a lifelong dependence that's worse than heroin? What else does one need to create stability in life? And how can outreach and social workers help OST clients in reaching a more stable and fulfilling life?

These were some of the questions that were addressed when Mainline trained outreach workers on OST in South Africa.

Three days training

Mainliners Jos Luteijn and Rafaela de Quadros Rigoni jointly planned and delivered the training with Shaun Shelly, our local partner from TB/HIV Care. OUT Wellbeing, another local partner organisation, hosted the training in Pretoria. Outreach workers from Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria's needle and syringe exchange projects joined the 3 days training.

The training consisted of two parts. The first part focused on understanding the medical aspects of OST. The second on the psychosocial assistance you can provide to OST clients.

On the medical side, we dug into how heroin dependence works and how opiate substitutes (especially methadone and buprenorphine) acts in our body and interacts with other drugs.

On the psychosocial side, some interventions discussed were motivational interviewing, competence based work and how to build SMART goals with OST clients. Several practical exercises helped participants to preview how to use this information in their daily routines in the field.

Outreach workers also received guidance in preparing mini-trainings to their peers in order to pass on the information acquired.

Building and spreading knowledge on OST has a special meaning for these NSP teams in South Africa. Through the advocacy work funded by Mainline within the Bridging the Gaps Programme, our local partners assured 3 new OST pilots in the country. These are starting in 2017 in the cities of Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. Currently, OST costs 10 times more in South Africa than in other countries.

Moreover, opiate substitutes are mostly acquired by private means only, through clinics or private doctors. Pretoria will be the first city to run a public OST pilot for 100 users, starting at OUD well-being clinic. From there, the project will spread to 21 primary health care clinics in the city. Clinics will be delivering OST and focusing on substance dependency issues.

The training is part of our efforts to support OST access along with integrated services that promote the rights of people who use drugs.

Are you interested in this training?

Feel free to contact Machteld Busz (m.busz@mainline.nl) for more information or see 'Training and expertise' on our site: <http://english.mainline.nl/page/training-expertise>