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Innovative way of treating of dadah abusers

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MENTION TC, and you are sure to hear "Daytop" and "William B. O'Brien" cropping up.

O'Brien, 72, is the man responsible for spending almost 40 years of his life developing, modernising and using the TC modality, which not only is helping substance abusers kick the habit, but making them regain their self-esteem, re-equipping them with moral and ethical values, and preparing them to re-enter the society by giving them some vocational or technical training.

This may sound like an impossible task. But the fact is researchers from some of the world's top universities have independently evaluated and confirmed that even after five years, those who have gone through this innovative programme remained dadah-free.

Today, 65 countries have adopted the TC modality to help substance abusers.

Says O'Brien, the founder-president of New York-based Daytop, the organisation spearheading the use of TC (Daytop is the acronym for Drug Addicts Yielding To Persuasion): "TC is not new. In various forms, it has been used in ancient times to help people.

"What we have done over the years is to develop it to meet today's needs in the light of modern day challenges.

"Through a well structured programme based on love, care and understanding, we can conquer despair and self-destruction.

"We believe that substance abusers once had self-respect and self-esteem. Perhaps due to some reason, they wanted to escape what they perceived as the horror and emptiness of everyday life and resorted to instant gratification by taking to dadah.

"We have always believed that these fallen people can still be saved. And we do this through the TC whose primary goal is fostering personal growth."

This is accomplished by gradually changing an individual's life-style through a community of concerned people working together to help themselves and each other.

The Therapeutic Community represents a highly structured environment with clearly defined boundaries, both moral and ethical.

It employs community imposed sanctions and penalties, as well as earned advancement of status and privileges as part of the recovery and growth process, adds O'Brien who is also the president of the World Federation of Therapeutic Communities (WFTC).

The objective of the WFTC is to bring together all those involved in helping substance abusers in a worldwide association of sharing, understanding and co-operation within the global TC Movement.

The very name Therapeutic Community gives a clear indication of what to expect in such a system.

The Greek word therapeuein means "to take care of; to heal". Thus, the word has come to mean "concerning, or contributing to the healing and caring of a disease or problem; bringing a feeling of general well-being", according to some dictionaries.

And the Latin word communitas signifies "fellowship", and the word "community" connotes "group of people bonded together by a common objective or fellowship".

Expanding on these very meaningful and significant definitions, the TC

modality takes a holistic approach not just treating the substance abuser's problem as a problem in isolation, but dealing with him as a whole, taking social and psychological factors into account as well as the physical symptoms.

"I must stress that we at the WFTC recognise the imperative of indigenous leadership in adapting the TC to respective cultures.

"While fostering sponsorship training by experienced staff and member-agencies, we completely reject any form of colonialistic control," says O'Brien who has been responsible during his four decades of TC involvement for helping to give a new lease of life to more than 80,000 young men and women.

In recognition of its role, his organisation has been granted Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council of the United Nations as a Non-Government Organisation, and also chartered as an international, non-profit and non-sectarian agency in the United States.

In fact, O'Brien, who is the author of the well-known book, You Cant't Do It Alone (a handy, moving manual for parents with substance abuse problems in the family) is even widely being mentioned as a potential Nobel Prize nominee for his dynamic and extraordinary personal role in combating the dadah scourge and giving a new lease of life to substance abusers, especially youths, worldwide.

Several Malaysians have visited Daytop, met O'Brien and talked to the residents of his TC centres in the USA and have been impressed.

These have included Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali, the wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad; UN Permanent Representative Tan Sri Razali Ismail; several Cabinet Ministers, senior officers from the Police, the Prisons and Narcotics Agencies and officials of Non-Government Organisations.

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