

A therapeutic response or 'a free fix'?
The Irish experience of methadone maintenance treatment.

Tony Carlin, Probation & Welfare Service

Summary

This paper will initially outline the prevalence of methadone maintenance treatment in the European and Irish context. The second section will then highlight the main benefits of methadone maintenance to both the individual and society, using the work of Nyswander and Dole in the 1960s as the starting point. This will be followed by a discussion of reasons for opposition to its use. The fourth section will look at abstinence-oriented methadone reduction treatment as an alternative to methadone maintenance and in doing so will outline its shortcomings. The concluding part of this paper will focus specifically on methadone maintenance in the Irish context and the ambivalence that surrounds its use. The paper concludes by proposing that while methadone maintenance is by no means a perfect solution, it is nonetheless, to date, the most pragmatic and successful treatment response to opiate dependency.

Keywords Methadone, maintenance, abstinence, opiate, dependency, addiction, harm reduction.