

THE GREEK SYSTEM AND POLICY IN CONTINUING EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION

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1. Introduction

The problem of substance abuse and dependence in Greece started to be an emergency of public concern since the middle of the '80s. The first treatment agencies and prevention programmes has been created in the same period.

Actually, there is a complex constellation of prevention and treatment programmes mostly belonging, directly or indirectly, to the public sector. The efficiency and the quality of the services offered by the prevention and treatment agencies greatly depend on the education and qualification of their staff.

The increasing need for life-long training of professionals working in the substance addiction field is the result of:

1. The changing patterns of substance abuse and the increasing number of clients presenting different problems and, especially, psychiatric comorbidity.
2. The changing needs of clients and especially of those belonging to specific groups (women, adolescents, immigrants, etc.)
3. The variety of educational and professional profiles of the workers in the field.
4. The high demanding nature of the work and the consequent quite common phenomenon of professional burn-out.
5. The rapid expansion of prevention and treatment services, which , however, are not always staffed with trained professionals.

Offering adequate training to young professionals at their first employment is necessary as well as providing update training and supervision for experienced professionals.

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The differentiation of educational and professional profiles of the workers employed in the field, from one side ensures a wider gamma of responses to the multiplicity and complexity of clients' needs, from the other requires a common educational base, which is usually provided only within the single agency.

Most of the professionals come from university education in medical, psychological or social sciences, while others, mainly working in therapeutic communities, had an experiential training as ex-users, accompanied by some professional education.

The **Greek National Action Plan 2002-2006** set out measures for a balanced development of appropriate drug demand reduction actions, and aims to strengthen cooperation among the agencies involved. Training programmes for professionals working in the prevention as well as in the treatment field have been gradually improved, encouraging pluralistic views in treatment approaches.

The Greek government, which held the EU Presidency in the first half of 2003, introduced new initiatives in the context of the EU Horizontal Working Party on Drugs and the European Action Plan 2000 - 2004, which were fully adopted by the Councils of Ministers. Among the others, a resolution of the representatives of member state governments participating in the ministerial section on developing curricula on drug abuse disorders was adopted, with the purpose of integrating them in pre-graduate university courses for medical students and other health care students and professionals.

2. Institutions offering training and continuing training in the field of substance abuse and dependence

A) The Organisation Against Drugs (OKANA) was established pursuant to **Law 2161/93** and has been operational since 1995 as an institution reporting to the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity.

The role of OKANA is to:

- ⇒ plan, promote, coordinate and implement a national policy on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts,
- ⇒ address the drug problem at a national level, provide valid and documented information, and raise public awareness,

- ⇒ establish and effectively manage prevention centres, treatment units and social and professional reintegration centres.

OKANA has the role of national coordinator and services and programmes provider in the fields of prevention, treatment and reintegration. It works together with national, European and international organisations.

Regarding prevention, OKANA collaborates with local government authorities in order to create an extended network of Prevention Centres all over Greece.

Together with the University Mental Health Research Institute (UMHRI), OKANA has created an **Educational Centre for the Promotion of Health and Prevention of Drug Abuse** in an effort to train prevention staff and to produce the necessary training material to assist them in their work. From 1996 onwards, the Educational Centre has been offering foundation courses to prevention staff has been ensuring their continuing training together with the Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals (KETHEA), the Greek Centre for Inter-Cultural Psychiatry and Health Care (EKDPSP), and other bodies.

The Educational Centre for the Promotion of Health and Prevention of Drug Abuse aims to:

- ⇒ provide a three-month basic training to prevention staff,
- ⇒ produce information and training material for local prevention trainers,
- ⇒ train staff in specialized domains, such as prevention programme implementation in primary schools.

In order to correctly plan and evaluate prevention programmes, OKANA has published the 'Evaluation Guide for Interventions relating to the Prevention of Addictive Substance Use', as well as a manual entitled "Prevention: Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs".

The Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals trains and supports prevention staff in the following areas:

- ⇒ prevention programme implementation in primary schools with the "skills for primary school pupils" package,
- ⇒ networking of services dealing with drug addiction.

The Greek Centre for Inter-Cultural Psychiatry and Health Care trains and supports prevention staff when it comes to:

- ⇒ the Armed Forces,
- ⇒ special and moving population groups,
- ⇒ health professionals.

The scientific staff of OKANA's Prevention Department also participate in European and international training programmes in the field of prevention. As a result, professional can exchange experiences, broaden their knowledge and skills, and learn about new trends and prevention strategies around the world.

B) The Educational Centre for the Promotion of Health and Prevention of Drug Abuse operates as a program of the University Mental Health Research Institute (UMHRI) since May 1995 and it was created with the collaboration and financing of the Organization Against Drugs (OKANA). Particularly in the field of primary prevention the Educational Centre is in charge of:

- a) the area of training qualified staff in the field of primary prevention
- b) the area of developing scientific, educational and informational material needed for the implementation of prevention programs.

The Educational Centre provides training mainly to professionals in the field of Health, Social and Human sciences that work in Prevention Centres, implementing primary prevention programs in local communities, with the collaboration of the local authorities.

The training is addressed mainly to social workers, sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists that are or going to be positioned in the local primary prevention centres. The candidates are proposed by the Local Governments in order to staff the local prevention centres of OKANA.

Apart from the standard qualifications (acknowledged diploma), the following are also appraised:

- previous employment in their object of study,
- experience in the field of addiction and generally in the field of psycho-social intervention,
- training in psychotherapeutic methods.

Training objectives

- The clarification of basic theoretical concepts that concern the philosophy of primary prevention and the promotion of health.
- The exchange of opinions and experiences between professionals in various fields and the investigation of new possibilities of scientific collaboration and coordinated action.
- The acquaintance with the functions and the activities of specialized services that are related to primary prevention, to treatment and rehabilitation of addicted persons.
- The familiarization with the methodology and the techniques of primary prevention, as well as the possibilities of their elaboration and adaptation in the specific conditions in which they are called to intervene.
- The training in the methodology of planning, applying and evaluating, both short preventive implementations, as well as primary prevention programs, based on specific educational materials.

Structure and organization of training

The structure of the training program is organized according to the established needs of the candidates to be trained. The training is based on the following axes:

- a) General presentations of the lecturers
- b) Exercises based on active learning
- c) Trainees discussion groups
- d) Local visits in specialized structures of primary prevention and treatment
- e) Projection of films
- f) Practical training.

The program is readjusted continuously, according to the evaluations of the trainees and the on going needs of Prevention Centres.

Content and issues of the specific education

The educational training program can be divided in two large sections:

1. **The basic components of the phenomenon of substance abuse**
General theoretical concepts are introduced, considered to be essential for comprehending the complexity of the substance abuse phenomenon, as well as its connection with its other components.
2. **The prevention of substance abuse**
This second part of the training constitutes the largest section of educational program, occupying its two thirds. Following the acquisition of basic theoretical knowledge of the dimensions of substance abuse, the trainees are called to enter into the ongoing puzzle of primary prevention that will constitute also their later work in the Prevention Centres. This section is separated in the following sub-sections:
Philosophy and general principles of primary prevention,
Primary prevention in childhood,
Prevention in adolescence,
Prevention in the family,
Basic principles of implementation planning and evaluation,
Practical training.

Evaluation of the training program

At the end of each educational cycle, the trainees are called to evaluate the training. Each trainee fills out an anonymous open-end questionnaire. The evaluation results are used towards the modification of the educational program, trying to meet the needs of the trainees.

Duration and termination of the training program

Attendance to the program is daily. The training takes place in the premises of the Educational Centre, with the exception of the short-term interventions that take place in communal facilities, within the concepts of practical training.

Attendance to the educational program constitutes a basic condition in order for the trainees to use the educational materials.

At the end of the training program, provided that the trainees have attended the program regularly and they have completed their practice, a certificate of attendance is been awarded.

Short Duration Training

The Educational Centre provides for prevention professionals, a specialized training on its educational materials, both within the period of

the three-month training program, and within special shorter duration trainings. These trainings are mainly addressed to professionals who have not attended the three-month training program or to professionals, which attended the first cycles of the training program, when some of the educational materials hadn't been published yet. Moreover, the Educational Centre organizes special trainings to cover the needs of prevention professionals working at Prevention Centres, which deal with service requests that cover a major field of their everyday activity.

Requests for help and how to face them

The training regarding the response to requests for help has a total duration of 12 days (60 hours) divided into three cycles - approx. one cycle per month for three months. The training has the opportunity for continuity twice a year, for a fifteen-day period each time. This training aims at the endorsement of prevention professionals to cope with various requests for help from individuals or groups, to which they should respond. Understanding and responding to a request for help is a process that requires theoretical knowledge and professional experience. Prevention professionals working in the Prevention Centres need support in order to elaborate and monitor the various demands for help which are addressed to them. The structure of the training is mainly supervision of actual cases, emerging from the daily practice of prevention professionals.

Executives and Professionals of Health Education of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (M.E.R.A)

In January 1998 the Educational Training Centre held two five-days seminars for the executives of Health Education and the members of the M.E.R.A. Health Education. The goal of this seminar was to provide information regarding the content and methodology of the educational material "On my own two feet" translated and published by OKANA and UMHRI, so that it could be used by organized programs of Promotion of Health, addressed to secondary education.

54 professionals of Health Education and 3 executives of the M.E.R.A. were trained in the two seminars, which had duration of 35 hours each.

Officers of the Hellenic Police

The Educational Centre for the Promotion of Health and Prevention of Drug Abuse, organizes short training seminars, requested from the

Ministry of Public Order, since May 1997. These seminars are addressed to officers of the Hellenic Police, coping directly or indirectly with substance addiction and can have a parallel action with Prevention Centres.

The training aims to provide information and sensitization to Police Officers on subjects that concern prevention of drug abuse, different approaches of treatment of the addicted individuals and management of those individuals during their arrest. Furthermore, this training attempts to set the foundations of collaboration between Police, treatment facilities and Prevention Centres, so that the phenomenon of substance abuse can be confronted in a more complete and effective way.

C) The Therapy Centre for Dependent Individuals training activities for professionals working in the field of drug addiction treatment:

The training of staff for addiction treatment and prevention is part of KETHEA's basic mission. Combining scientific knowledge with rich clinical experience, KETHEA offers certified educational programmes in co-operation with similar organisations and universities in Greece, Europe and the United States. These programmes are aimed at professionals working with recognised entities in the field of drug addiction, regardless of the therapeutic or preventive model followed, and cover the need for further training and life-long education. KETHEA also provide the opportunity for practical training for students of psychology and social sciences from Greece and abroad and provides research programmes for postgraduate students and doctoral candidates. The library of KETHEA, specialised in subjects related to addiction, is directed at mental health workers, researchers and students.

The major educational programmes offered by KETHEA on an annual basis are:

- Drug-addiction counselling: Knowledge, skills and attitude in professional practice, in co-operation with the **Department of Psychiatry of the University of California, San Diego**. Duration of 180 hours.
- Social planning and social policy, in co-operation with the **Department of Social Policy of Boston College**. Duration of 180 hours.
- Introduction to group dynamics.

- Vocational guidance and counselling of former addicts. Duration of 150 hours.
- Family therapy programme, addressed to professionals working in treatment or prevention of drug abuse.

KETHEA also provides educational programmes for groups of professionals who are to staff newly established treatment and prevention centres. These programmes include theory, practice, research and service planning and require daily attendance.

KETHEA "Counselling in the field of drug addiction: Knowledge, skills, attitude in professional practice", Athens 2000.

This manual was published within the framework of the educational programme on the above subject for professionals, arranged by KETHEA in co-operation with the Psychiatry Department of the University of California at San Diego. It deals with the attitude, knowledge and skills required for the consummate professional in the field of treatment and prevention of drug addiction.

Furthermore, KETHEA organises congresses and meetings with speakers from Greece and abroad, which cover a whole range of subjects of interest to the staff of the organisations involved in treatment and prevention, social services and penal institutions, offering important occasions of updating the professionals' knowledge, exchanging experiences, etc. Among other events, KETHEA organised the 13th World Congress of Therapeutic Communities called "Know Thyself" in Athens in 1990, and the 2nd European Congress of Therapeutic Communities called "Europe against Drugs" in Thessaloniki in 1995. In 2005, KETHEA together with the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities organised the 10th European Conference on Rehabilitation and Drug Policy.

Certification of professionals - ICRC

Since several years, the main purpose of KETHEA's co-operation with the International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium/Alcohol and Other Drugs (ICRC), which is the internationally recognised authority certifying drug counsellors and prevention specialists, is the certification of professionals working in the field of drug addiction and the provision of quality services to addicted individuals and their families. With the participation of distinguished scientists from Greece, Cyprus and Malta, KETHEA established the first Scientific Committee for the Certification

of Drug Addiction Counsellors within these countries. The Committee is authorised by the ICRC to examine applications and issue certification to professionals from the three mentioned countries, according to international standards as well as the specific cultural conditions prevailing in each country. The ICRC certification is international in scope and is recognised in all countries where the ICRC is active (Germany, Greece, United Kingdom, USA, Canada, Cyprus, Malta, Sweden).

D) The Athens University Department of Psychiatry (Chair: Prof. C.Soldatos) organised a pilot training programme addressed to medical doctors "**Medical education in Substance Use Management**", based on the educational material produced by the **European Addiction Training Institute (EATI)**.

A group of 17 medical doctors, four of them qualified general practitioners, participated to the programme held in the period March - June 2005, with a total duration of 55 hours.

The structure of the programme was based on lectures, conducted by expert professionals of the field, on issues regarding substance abuse and addiction and their treatment, discussion in focus groups, role-playing and other experiential exercises.

The contents of the programme included the following issues:

- ⇒ Epidemiological data from Europe and Greece
- ⇒ Alcohol and other drugs use: effects and related health problems
- ⇒ The bio-psycho-social approach to substance abuse and dependence
- ⇒ Evidence-based practice and best practice approach
- ⇒ Guidelines for information and guidance on alcohol and other drugs use
- ⇒ The physician's primary role in the management of substance use problems
- ⇒ Early detection of alcohol and drug use problems
- ⇒ Brief interventions by the clinician for patients presenting alcohol and/or drug abuse

⇒ Motivational interviewing techniques

⇒ Visits to substance addiction facilities.

The programme was evaluated in each phase both by the trainees and the trainers, who expressed a general satisfaction for the all experience. The evaluation process led to new proposals for the improvement of the training programme, its establishment within the post-graduate education, as well as the organization of periodical meetings of the group with the purpose of exchanging experiences and facing issues from participants' current practice.

3) Other institutions offering educational activities in the field of substance abuse

A) The State Psychiatric Hospital of Athens - Therapy Unit for Drug Dependence "18 Ano", in addition to the standard training offered to the first employed staff members, periodically organises workshops, seminars and congresses on substance abuse treatment approaches, specific populations (i.e. addicted women's needs), motivational interview techniques, etc.

B) The European Association of Professionals Working in the Field of Drug Addiction ITACA - Greek Section was founded in 1997 and since then has periodically organised international as well as national scientific meetings (congresses, seminars, workshops, etc.) on substance abuse issues addressed to the Greek professionals of the field. Furthermore, within the frame of the initiatives taken by ITACA Europe, a group of professionals from Greece participated in 1999 and 2000 to the programme "**exchange of professionals**", which included one-week stage in treatment facilities of other European countries, in order to experience different prevention and treatment approaches and philosophy. The Greek Section of ITACA took also an editorial initiatives with the publication of the volume: "**Substance addiction: current issues**" (2004) edited by the authors of the present report. The volume offers an updated and panoramic view of the problem of drug use and abuse in Greece and of the main approaches in prevention and treatment. It represents a polyphonic text addressed not only to the professionals of the field, but also to clinicians and professionals working in public health services as well as in the domain of education.

C) The Hellenic Psychiatric Association (Chair: Prof. G. Christodoulou): the Substance Abuse Section (Chair of the Section: Prof. I.A. Liappas) has been founded during 2005. To provide continuing education programmes to psychiatrists and other mental health professionals is one of its main aims.

4) Conclusions

Despite the fact that the opportunities of training and continuing training offered to the professionals of the field of substance abuse prevention and treatment in Greece have been greatly increased, there are not yet established programmes of continuing training in all the prevention and treatment services. In fact, the participation to educational events has been usually left to the initiative of the single professional, with no specific obligation.

From one hand continuing training is often perceived by the professionals as a way to avoid burn-out, from the other professional accreditation and professional development are not always linked to the participation to educational activities, so that often there is no direct acknowledge of their efforts.

The development of training programmes that meet the professionals training needs is critical in assisting them to increase the quality of their work and be effective. The collaboration between prevention and treatment agencies and universities may contribute to create more opportunities for qualified in-service and continuing training in the substance abuse field, in order to promote interdisciplinary approaches, avoiding "ideological dogmatism" and enhancing dialogue between experts.

Sources:

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