METHADONE MAINTENANCE TREATMENT PROGRAM (MMTP) IN NEPAL; ROLE OF USER-LED ORGANIZATIONS IN ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING MMTP PATIENTS

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Background:

There are 92,436 people who use drugs (PUDs) in Nepal (Central Bureau of Statistics 2018). MMTP was first started in early1990s through a private clinic to treat opioid users and prevent HIV among people who inject drugs (PWIDs), which stopped in 1999 due to administrative problems.

Description of model of care/intervention:

In 2006, United Nations office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) in cooperation with Nepal Government re-started MMTP with 3 sites in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Pokhara. MMTP supported by UNODC phased-out in 2010, therefore since 2011 to the date Save the Children (S.C) under the Global Fund HIV & AIDS Program has been supporting MMTP in Nepal. MMTP is primarily operated through 2 units; (1) Medical Unit-(M.U.)-unit managed by doctors/nurses to dispense methadone and provide medical care (2) Social Support Unit-(SSU)-unit managed by drug users themselves to provide counseling and social supports to MMTP patients.

Effectiveness:

- Currently there are 14 MMTP sites in total across the country with an estimated 2500 PUDs enrolled on the program.
- All MMTP sites have SSU managed by drug users themselves.
- SSUs have a canteen within their premises which are run by MMTP patients themselves thereby supporting their livelihoods.
- SSU provides mechanical, mobile maintenance etc. trainings to patients thus many patients have started their own auto-mobile workshops.
- MMTP patients are often arrested by police because of their past drug use history, hence SSUs rescue these users and even provide methadone to patients while in custody.

Conclusion and next steps:

SSU createsmore employment opportunities for PWIDs. These initiations from user-led organizations which are empowering & engaging PWIDs whilst supporting their livelihood should be recognized and encouraged by the Government.The Government should be accountable & responsible enough towards its PWID population by taking-over all drug programs.

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