

Holyrood hosts DrugScope's great debate on treatment Manchester and London to follow

4 April 2008

On Thursday 3 April, the Scottish Parliament building in Edinburgh played host to an exciting and challenging debate on the future of drug treatment. DrugScope, in partnership with Conference Consortium, launched the first of the 'The Great Debate' series at Holyrood, where drug sector professionals, treatment practitioners, service users, healthcare workers and other interested parties, debated and discussed the issues and ideology of drug treatment.

The national debate on treatment effectiveness was given fresh impetus in October 2007 when the BBC challenged the government over the abstinence record of English treatment services. At the same time in Scotland, results from a national study on treatment efficacy created a similar controversy.

At the debate's heart is the fundamental question of abstinence - not just from illegal drugs, but from similar medications: should it be seen as the 'gold standard' treatment goal? Some fear that a goal of abstinence above all else threatens the harm reduction gains associated with treatments such as prescribing the heroin substitute methadone, which caters for people unable to entirely do without opiate-type drugs.

In January, DrugScope published a paper looking at treatment and ideology. The paper, by Mike Ashton (Editor of *Drug and Alcohol Findings*), is entitled 'The new abstentionists'. As part of the attempt to widen the debate further, DrugScope, in partnership with Conference Consortium, has organised a series of half-day seminars to enable professionals in the field to put across their views.

Hosted by Scotland's Futures Forum (SFF), Thursday's afternoon of discussion and debate at Holyrood began with presentations from Mike Ashton, Professor Neil McKeganey, Dr Tom Gilhooly, Jackie Johnston, Jason Wallace, Janet McGowan and Catriona Doran. Dr Brian Kidd of the Scottish Association of Alcohol and Drug Action Teams chaired the panel discussion.

Delegates then engaged in a 'Question Time' style debate. Issues discussed included the position of methadone within the Scottish drugs field, changing language around drug treatment and an increased political focus on the concept of 'recovery'. Definitions of concepts such as 'recovery', 'treatment', 'abstinence' and 'harm reduction' were also questioned and debated. The impact of stigma on drug users was also discussed.

Two further events are planned, in Manchester on 10th April and in London on 16th April and delegate places are still available, although they are going fast.

In Manchester, the event will be held at the Britannia Hotel, Portland Street, between 1.30pm - 4.30pm. Panellists will include Mike Ashton, Ian Wardle, Peter McDermott, Tim Leighton and Paolo Pertica, chaired by Professor Susanne MacGregor.

In London, the event will be held at the University of London, Malet Street, Bloomsbury. Professor Susanne MacGregor will be chairing once again. Panellists include Mike Ashton, Richard Philips, Glenda Daniels, Sara McGrail and David Best.

There will be a £15 charge for delegates to attend the events in Manchester and London to cover costs. Thanks to the support of the Scottish Futures Forum, it was possible to stage the event in Edinburgh free of charge to delegates.

DrugScope and Conference Consortium would like to thank both the Scottish Futures Forum and Schering-Plough for their generous sponsorship of these events.

If you are interested in attending the events in Manchester or in London, please visit the Conference Consortium website (see link below) or email debate@conferenceconsortium.org specifying your preferred venue.

Related Links



[You can download Mike Ashton's article, 'The new abstentionists', here.](#) Good practice and research in treatment e.g. raising quality, studies and surveys and dual diagnosis

[The Conference Consortium website contains further details and registration forms for the Manchester and](#)

