Conclusions: Our data identify the considerable extent to which
the prison population (restricted to the much larger male prison
population in our study) represent a particularly high risk group with
extensive lifetime exposure to injecting drug abuse, promiscuous
sexual behaviour and tattooing. Furthermore, the study also identi-
ifies the extremely poor level of knowledge regarding HIV and AIDS
in a high risk population. This has important implications for future
AIDS control programmes in India.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF ILLNESS: A NOVEL
METHOD OF ASSESSING PATIENTS’ PERCEPTIONS
OF THE IMPACT OF ILLNESS

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Background: In people with chronic illnesses, a measure of the
overall importance of the illness to the person’s life would be valu-
able to better understand individual responses to illness and develop
focused psychosocial interventions. Existing instruments measuring
cognitive, behavioural or emotional responses to illness are unsatis-
factory as direct measures of the importance of illness because, with
very few exceptions, they focus on factors contributing to morbidity
rather than well-being, and measure specific pathology (such as
depression, or the presence or absence of functional impairment).

In an attempt to devise a summary measure of the importance of illness
to the individual, a simple graphic task has been devised, and used
in a pilot study of 24 people with rheumatoid arthritis attending a
rheumatology outpatient clinic.

Methods: Subjects were shown an A4-size sheet of paper, with
a coloured disk, 4 cm in diameter, at one corner. Each subject was
asked to imagine that the paper represented his/her life, and the
disk represented the subject’s core self. The subject was then given
another disk, the same size as the fixed one. Subjects were asked to
imagine that the second disk represented the illness, and instructed
to place the disk where they considered most appropriate on the
sheet of paper. The main outcome measure of task was the distance
between the two disks representing ‘self’ and ‘illness’.

Results: With only 2 exceptions, subjects had no difficulty under-
standing the task. The distance between ‘self’ and ‘illness’ showed
no correlation with a measure of disease activity, but was signifi-
cantly correlated with depression (r = -0.64), the General Health
scale of the SF36 (r = 0.42), Antonovsky’s Sense of Coherence scale
(r = 0.59), and measures of pain.

Conclusions: This simple task appears to provide a summary
measure of the importance of illness to the sufferer. Because it
is non-verbal, its results do not rely on the subject’s knowledge
of spoken English. However, it can also be used as a projective
assessment, by encouraging the subject to describe aloud how he/she
chooses where to place the illness in relation to self. Used thus,
it can contribute to the individual assessment of patients prior to
a psychosocial intervention. Work is currently underway to further
characterize responses to the task.

RECOGNITION AND TREATMENT OF
PSYCHOPATHOLOGICAL DISORDERS IN PAEDIATRIC
CLINIC

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The long observation of 166 children with functional paroxysmal
tachycardia and extrasystolia shows that mental disorders revealed
in more than 80% of cases (mainly mono- and bipolar affective
syndrome including panic attacks, and also chronic hypomaniacs,
neurotic, neurosislike, psychopathialike, epilepticiform states, bor-
derline personal disorders. We noted a distinct relation between
functional cardiac and psychopathological disorders connected in-
separably in the integral psychovegetative syndrome. Nootropes
antirhythmic effect is strengthened if peculiarities of their psy-
chotropic action are taking into account; nootropyl as a stimulator
is more prescribed in conditions of asthenic range, encephalob pos-
sessing mild antidrepressive properties is effective in subdepressive
states, phenibutum and pantohamum as sedative drugs are preferable
in anxiety-diathymic, phobic, hypomaniac disorders. The use of
psychotrophic drugs according to the peculiarities of mental disorders
given patients leads on the one hand quite often towards consid­
erable improvement manifesting in cessation or obvious relief and
frequency reduction of the attacks of paroxysmal tachycardia with
simultaneous normalisation of mental condition. The most effective
here are normothymics, such as finelepin, lithii carbonas, sonapax
and also antidepressants. The principle of minimal sufficiency used
by us during psychotropic therapy of psychovegetative disorders
helps to avoid to a certain extent negative consequences of treatment,
when the intrinsic vegetotrophic effect of psychotropic drugs can lead
the psychotropic action and hinder the recovery.

HARM REDUCTION BY METHADONE MAINTENANCE
TREATMENT OF GERIATIC HEROIN ADDICTS

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The exacerbation of asthma, recurrence of eczema or reemergence
of angina in spite of treatment are often regarded as the natural
course of disease, rather than simply a treatment failure. Patients are
not penalized, nor are physicians criticized for such not-so-perfect
outcome. But continued heroin use by addicts on Methadone Mainte-
nance Treatment (MMT) is often considered as an intolerable social
behavior and an unacceptable medical practice. We studied all pa-
patients who were older than 65 years of age and were receiving MMT
for their heroin addiction. Urine samples were randomly collected
and screened for heroin for 12 months. The data was analyzed using
Student t-test. There were 20 male patients who were 67.35 ± 2.87
years old and had been on MMT for 95.36 ± 69.79 months. They
first used heroin at the age of 25.05 ± 9.61 years and then continued
for the next 36.80 ± 15.06 years. After failing the detoxification for
at least 1.55 times, they started the MMT. During the study period 15
patients had used heroin at some time, at the rate of 11.10 ± 11.19%.
These patients used to use heroin 23.25 ± 8.63 days per month
before starting the MMT, but now has used heroin only 0.25 ± 0.72
days per month. Even though the MMT failed to produce absolute
abstinence, it did significantly (p < 0.0001) decrease the frequency
of heroin use among geriatric addicts. Since the intravenous drug
abuse is associated with acquiring and/or spread of numerous dis-
eases, like HIV infection; even a small decrease in frequency of
heroin use provides a significant impact in curtailing the morbidity
and mortality among geriatric population. Thus harm reduction is a
significant outcome of Methadone Maintenance Treatment.