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2nd Place Student Essay



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"Should Middle School Students be Subjected to Drug Screening by the State of California?"

BOTH THE EARLY DIAGNOSIS and Preventive Treatment of Psychotic Illness (EDAPT) Clinic at the University of California, Davis and Xavier Amador in his book: *I Am Not Sick I Don't Need Help?* (2000) found that there may be a direct correlation between mental illness and the use of illegal drugs in individuals twelve years of age up to forty years old. The EDAPT Clinic at the University of California, Davis determined the eligibility age for referrals to start from age twelve up to forty years old. Early diagnosis and Preventive Treatment of Psychotic Illness begin with individuals who need intensive multidisciplinary treatment.

Xavier Amador, the Director of Psychology at the New York State Psychiatric Institute is a professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Amador believes that individuals with mental illness at times refuse treatment because they don't believe they are ill. He offers guidelines and strategies to conquer denial and makes recommendations how family members can assist their loved one to seek professional help for schizophrenia and manic-depression. Anna-Lisa Johansson assisted Dr. Amador in writing the book. Ms. Johansson works part time for the Treatment Advocacy Center in Arlington, Virginia. She suffered with schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder.

In my opinion, early diagnosis of mental illness can make individuals more susceptible to treatment. They can live their lives as productive citizens rather than deny their situations. Dr. Amador points out that 50% of individuals with mental illness deny their condition. He gives successful cases where his step by step guide assisted families in encouraging their loved ones into accepting their situations, seek treatment and take their prescribed medicines.

Educational leaders often failed to realize that teens need education in the areas of drug prevention, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, teen pregnancy and bullying in schools. Parents also are hesitant to allow their children participation in these programs if they are offered in the schools. As a result, comprehensive health programs have always had a battle to find its rightful place into the school curriculum. In his book: *Promoting Teen Health: Linking Schools, Health Organizations, and Community*, Alan C. Henderson hints on the serious problems that young people are facing in the schools, and he recommends ways to address these problems through health promotion, information and education. Each chapter addresses a specific problem with demographic representation and facts concerning the problem and the approaches that have proven to solve them. The most valuable part of

the book is the list of resources included and the factors and interventions by health promotion programs and their funding sources. These successes of these programs are evaluated in the book with perspectives from the participants. If in fact direct correlation exists between the use of drugs under the age of fifteen and mental illness such as schizophrenia then early detection can decrease the progression of mental disease. Both educational leaders and health professionals should work together to assist in early diagnosis to slow down its development. Educational and health professionals can help young people in getting life long treatment for other problems as well such as obesity, teen pregnancy, hypertension or diabetes. Even if drug testing is proven to be negative the results can be use to assist middle school students to be a more responsible young adult and to make better choices.

In conclusion, I believe that drug screening should be included into the school programs just like checking hair for lice and eyes for better vision. These practices are all preventive; so should be drug screening. However, for drug screening to be a successful part of the program Parents, Community Leaders, Health Science Professionals and educational Leaders must collaborate to provide pertinent information to parents and caregivers about the advantages of drug screening. Middle school students also will need knowledge about drug screening, the resources and counseling they need to make better decisions about their mental health. Young people need help to cope with problems and to succeed. Thus, working together as a team, educators and health professionals can offer a better solution to promote and subject middle school students to the drug screening process for better mental health. The study conducted by Gottfredson et al (2000) found that at least 9 percent of secondary schools conduct some sort of drug testing programs. Most of these programs focused mainly on athletes as a condition for participation in extracurricular activities. In addition, the Supreme Court (515 U.S. 646, 1999) mandates drug testing for athletes. Many students and parents still opposed drug testing programs. Every effort should be made by school officials and health officials to get parent involvement in drug screening programs and to keep them informed on illegal uses of drugs and their harmful effects on individuals and school age students. Subjecting middle school students on drug screening programs is a preventive measure in assisting them to overcome peer pressure. If knowledge is power, then by providing parents with the goals and reason for drug screening, they can support the drug screening programs in the schools from middle to high schools. However, I agree with the studies that based on their findings that drug screening in middle schools through high schools is necessary to monitor illegal use of drugs in youth and as preventive measures of promoting healthy mental health.

References

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