Comprehensive alcohol/drug education for offenders

Maurice DENNIS

Historically efforts in substance abuse have alternated between prevention and intervention with the definition of these terms not always being consistent. Legislation, as well as philosophical beliefs, has influenced the direction of the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) in Texas. Beginning in the early 1980's, a variety of legislative measures were enacted which directed the TCADA to develop, provide, monitor and evaluate prevention and intervention efforts for persons who came in contact with the criminal justice system. This paper describes five such programs.

TEXAS DRIVING WHILE INTOXICATED (DWI) EDUCATION PROGRAM

In 1983, legislation was passed which required any person convicted of DWI, who desired probation, to successfully complete a state approved eight hour alcohol education program. This prevented imprisonment and loss of a driver's license. Some programs had been in place since the late 1970's, but only on a limited court by court basis. Programs have since rapidly grown with over 60,000 persons annually taking the course from 159 certified programs. In addition, there are 64 Spanish language programs. In 1989, the course was expanded to 12 hours including drugs other than alcohol, but the prime emphasis is still on alcohol. A five day training program for use of the curriculum is required for persons who desire to teach the course. Basic components are:

Module A: Alcohol/Drug Traffic Safety Problem
   A-1 - Administration
   A-2 - Introduction to the Alcohol/Drug Traffic Safety Problem
   A-3 - Coping with Hostilities & Explanation of Texas Laws

Module B: Effects of Alcohol/Drugs on the Driving Task
   B-1 - Effects of Alcohol/Drugs on Humans
   B-2 - Alcohol/Drugs and Driving Task Abilities

Module C: Alcohol/Drug Abuse and Dependency
   C-1 - Coping with Alcohol/Drug Driving Situations & Introduction to Chemical Dependency
   C-2 - Symptoms of Dependency
   C-3 - Sources of Assistance

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Module D: Personal Actions to Avoid Future DWI Behavior

D-1 - Costs of DWI
D-2 - Decision Making
D-3 - Post Test and Course Evaluation

Exit interviews - Individual sessions may be conducted with each participant to discuss progress in the course and substance abuse evaluation.

Recidivism Research - In research conducted in 1991, TCADA found that first offenders completing DWI Education were 54% less likely within one year and 29% less likely in four years to receive another DWI than persons who took direct convictions with no education program. While the program was less effective for multiple offenders, those completing the education program were still 19% less likely to be re-arrested during the four year study period. (Fredland, 1991)

TEXAS DRIVING WHILE INTOXICATED (DWI) INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Because the basic program is not 100% effective in preventing recidivism and each year 30-40,000 choose not to attend the basic program, in 1990 a decision was made by the TCADA to create and implement a repeat offender program. This program is very intensive and focuses more on life-style issues and changes than providing basic information.

The course is 30 hours in length and has 15 modules. It must be taught by persons who are certified alcohol drug abuse counselors. Exit interviews and a six-month follow-up are included. The 15 modules are:

A. Program Overview & Review of Basic Course
B. Life Style Issues
C. Values and Self-esteem
D. Positive Thinking and Irrational Beliefs
E. Asserting Control and Goal Seeking
F. Responsibility
G. Physiological and Psychological Effects of Drugs
H. Alcoholism and the Chemical Dependency Process
I. Alcohol and the Family--Family Week
J. Co-dependency and Al-anon--Family Week
K. Treatment Options and 12-Step Self-help Groups
When Texas re-adopted a 21-year old legal drinking age in 1986, increases were noted in Minor In Possession (MIP) of alcohol offenses. This was especially true for the university undergraduate student population. Texas A&M University, for example, has approximately 25-30,000 students under age 21. Surveys have shown that 85-90% of these students choose to drink alcoholic beverages. The penalty for attempted purchase, possession, consumption, or possession of alcohol by those under age 21 was a fine of $25.00 - 200.00.

In 1988 responding to concerns from judges, Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and based on analysis of the arrest experience of DWI probationers (many of whom started with a MIP offense), a four hour education program designed for MIP offenders was developed.

Attendance was strictly at the discretion of a local judge. The education program has since been expanded to six hours. This was done to address alcohol abuse concerns and incorporate more class involvement and decision making activities. In 1994, the program was adopted by the TCADA for state-wide use. Since September 1, 1995, Texas law mandates alcohol awareness course attendance for MIP offenders or be sanctioned with loss of driver’s license for up to six months. Current components of the course include:

- Topic 1 - Social Values
- Topic 2 - Advertising
- Topic 3 - Alcohol and Young People
- Topic 4 - Alcohol and Age
- Topic 5 - Law
- Topic 6 - Youth Patterns and Problems
- Topic 7 - Decision Making

Screening for abuse - All participants complete the SASSI (Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory) at time of enrollment. This is analyzed and reviewed with each person at an individual exit interview after course completion. Recommendations for further screening or help may be made.
Evaluation - While no state-wide evaluation has been completed, one local pilot evaluation found that young people who completed the program were about one-half as likely to receive a future DWI arrest. Data is currently being collected to enable an evaluation of the 125 approved programs.

TEXAS DRUG OFFENDER PROGRAM

In 1991, the Texas legislature passed a law requiring the Texas Department of Public Safety to suspend the driver's license of convicted drug offenders. Reinstatement required completion of an approved drug education program (effective August 31, 1993). TCADA developed a curriculum and has trained instructors for 121 programs. The course is 15 hours in length and contains the following:

Overview and Introduction.
This module provides an overview of the course, an opportunity to share feelings about the course, and a brief history of drug use and current drug laws.

Dynamics of Drug Use.
This module gives an overview of the central nervous system, information about specific categories of drugs and how drugs work in the body.

Personal Consequences of Drug Use/Abuse.
This module examines the effects of drug involvement on individuals and society and the related financial costs, health risks and personal costs in relationships.

Drug Use and the Quality of Life.
This module examines the myth that drug use is glamorous and discusses the part drugs play in changing values and behavior and in harming self and others.

Skills for Lifestyle Changes.
This module covers suggestions for getting control of a person's life, resources for assistance in obtaining goals, and the development of a personal plan of action to accomplish these goals.

Programs are in place, but only administrative evaluation has been conducted.

TEXAS DRUG AND ALCOHOL DRIVING AWARENESS PROGRAM (DADAP)

All of the previously described programs are intervention in nature. Participants are persons who have been convicted of an alcohol or other drug offense. The DADAP was created in 1995.
to attempt to provide education and promote behavior change prior to commission of a legal infraction. In fact, the program prohibits credit for the course if a person has been convicted of a DWI or MIP offense within the seven year period preceding the course. Rather than require completion of the course as part of a court order, the DADAP provides an incentive to take the course. The Texas Board of Insurance permits drivers who complete the course to receive a 5% automobile insurance discount for a three year period. This may reduce a driver’s insurance premium by several hundred dollars. The program is six hours in length and contains the following elements:

Module One - Administration
Module Two - Introduction and Background
Module Three - Explanation of Texas Law
Module Four - Physiological and Psychological Effects of Alcohol/Drugs
Module Five - Effects of Alcohol/Drugs on the Driving Task
Module Six - Signs of a Problem
Module Seven - Decision Making

A three day instructor training program is required which includes a written examination and student teaching experience. Plans are underway to conduct a longitudinal impact evaluation of the program. Currently there are 44 approved programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Purely education solutions have not fared well as modifiers of behavior related to alcohol and drug use. A similar finding has been shown in evaluation of education countermeasures for those charged with alcohol and other drug related offenses. A number of deterrence concepts have been developed to deal with the problem caused by abuse of alcohol and other drugs as they relate to safety. These have included:

* Punitative action - jail, fines, loss of license, impounding, or confiscation of vehicles.
* Technology - ignition interlocks, breath testing devices, in-car video, passive restraints, hardware design.
* Social measures - increased taxes on alcohol, restrictions on advertising, designated drivers, citizen action groups.
* Education/Rehabilitation - pre-licensing, post conviction courses and treatment, public information and education.

Research on effectiveness has been difficult because rarely have any of these been implemented in isolation. Teasing out the contribution of a particular variable, when 8-10 other variables have been introduced simultaneously, has not always been possible. Education is not a “silver bullet” as it is not possible to inoculate against accidents. All of these education programs have
the potential to change behavior, over time, however and should be coordinated with the other
deterrence concepts.

REFERENCES


