

The challenge for drug treatment is how to connect with people, says *Jim McCartney*.



New Year challenge

One of the significant challenges we face within the drug treatment sector is how to connect with our service users

in a socially intelligent way to transform strategic thinking. Target driven objectives encapsulate the way this government functions – yet despite their importance in setting the direction of strategy, we can run the risk of superficial box-ticking exercises replacing an actionable and dynamic plan that can radically transform human lives trapped within addiction.

The public sector is, by its very nature, driven by a contractual relationship with organisations and people, which can scar its ability to connect meaningfully. For example the contractual concept clearly evident within the Criminal Justice System, whose paramount function is to manage and control offenders and keep our streets safe, cannot solve the problems of an increasing prison population. Why? Because there is little consideration given to the nature of relationships and the factors that influence behavioural processes.

The 1990s saw the dawn of competitive tendering, with the public sector entering a new arena with the private and third sectors. This was further developed by the New Labour Agenda, yet little attention has been given to the harvesting of quality relationships. It resulted in highly effective systems of monitoring and a

litany of new buzzwords – but do they have substance? The word ‘quality’ still has a weak voice within drug treatment strategy. This is because if we inflate its importance, it might contradict the very systems we have put in place to monitor our effectiveness.

There is no doubt we have come a long way in the last five years, mainly due to the creation of the National Treatment Agency, with its impact on service delivery and organisational design. Yet in many places there are still important parts of the jigsaw missing; a greater focus on holistic development and a move away from the domination of the clinical concept of treatment have to be addressed. We need to elevate the concept of human development to the forefront of strategic thinking.

The NHS perception of strategy is confined to the medical concept, and it runs the risk of becoming tunnel visioned and unable to grasp the developmental nature of people who often want to be set free from a life of prescribed drugs. The new drug treatment strategy post 2008 will need to focus more on the total and complete liberation of the addict, as well as focus on how to counteract the stigmatisation that still exists in our society, where people can be labelled according to their past histories. In addition it will need to look at the long-term development of some people who

have never been accustomed to the employment market, who need a tremendous amount of coaching and managing as they prepare for the culture of work, and support when they enter employment. We need to open the door to specialist human developers who can influence strategic thinking and transform the clinical perception of strategy.

I have recently set up a ‘mind gym’ for graduates of our rehabilitation programme. This is a gym of excellence, providing opportunities for people to metaphorically stretch the mind muscles into new realms of thinking. Each member of the gym is professionally managed and coached as they tap into the new resources they are discovering at the core of their being.

This is part of the Kaizen initiative that I have introduced into post Tier 4 treatment. Kaizen is the Japanese term for ‘incremental’, and represents gradual continuous change and improvement. It is a management philosophy assuming that every aspect of our life deserves to be constantly improved.

The Kaizen philosophy lies behind many Japanese management concepts, such as ‘total quality control’. Each member of Kaizen can be an asset to any business because they have radically transformed their lives; they have the essential strategies in place to succeed, and guard against failure. There is a strong marketing element to

the initiative as we give people a new brand image to the wider community.

Kaizen becomes a place where therapeutic graduates can return and share their experience. It provides ‘human capital’, the accumulated stock of skills, experience and knowledge. Creativity is a useful process because it improves communication, promotes learning and helps to develop new ideas, solutions or alternatives. In this setting, group creative problem solving gives participants an opportunity to articulate their thoughts, perceptions and assumptions. Most of its associates are also ex-offenders and have invaluable insight into the complexities faced by both criminal justice and drug treatment sectors, so they are able to give a priceless consultation to the evolution of public sector reform.

This is all part of the ‘whole person paradigm’, and develops the premise that human beings are not things needing to be motivated and controlled; they are four dimensional – body, mind, heart and spirit. The challenge for us is to get the balance right and nurture the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical components that can equip the individual with the desire to discover their potential.

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