

A day in the life of...



Dave Watkins treatment agency community support worker

Tuesday 09.00 I walk in. As usual I hear the shrieks of laughter from clients winding up staff members, waves and smiles, the timidity of a newcomer: eyes wide, panic concealed by the drinking of an offered coffee, but hanging in there, proof of the power of our 'open door'. Then there's Sian: sheepishly trying to get my attention, unsure of my reaction to see her back again, numerous detoxes and rehab attempts later. I mockingly shake my finger at her, sighing inside as I wonder what there is left to try with her. I know this much though – never give up, always go the extra mile, or the extra hundred miles as it sometimes turns out! People do get better. We have a quick chat and she tells me her woes of the last few weeks. She's only been using a little bit, just to get her through this difficult time... she's going to give treatment a real go this time... she means it. Let's wait and see I think, almost chuckling at this latest tale of excuses (she can be inventive I'll give her that!). But it's not funny, people die and we have to remember that. It's so important to be understanding, the illness is so devious and complicated she really believes she can't live without that hit – or drink, tab, rock, whatever, it's got her in its grip.

10.00 I moan to the others as I see my in-tray bulging. Funny really. When it's empty I worry what I've done wrong! Am I doing my job well enough? Grab a quick caffeine fix and up to the office. Phone calls: detox for John, rehab for Mary, Housing Options for

Gareth. First port of call when I meet a client... make sure they're warm, fed and have a place to go. Clients are usually very chaotic so we need to put some structure into their lives and make sure they receive the benefits they are entitled to before getting them into treatment. It's like a game of chess and the longer you do it the better you get. Next form-filling, the bane of my existence: DSS, DLA. Another phone call: the gas board. Poor Julie, £2k gas bill landed on her doormat. Enough to give anyone a panic, especially as she was on a meter! All sorted.

11.30 A call from my mate Larry in the cells, David was picked up again last night. Drunk and disorderly again. Out the door. In the car. Down to the cells. He's sorry, not sure what happened, won't happen again. Talk to Larry, another court appearance for both of us, but not today – I can take him home. The importance of networking. We're lucky here, we all seem to sing off the same hymn sheet – agency workers, social services, probation, courts, hospitals, mental hospitals, doctors, DSS, wet houses, dry houses, local health board. If your approach is right, people generally want to help not hinder you. It's so important to know that you've got back-up.

13.00 Quickly drop into the centre before starting house calls. Joanne's there, been kicked out of home and three months into recovery is looking vulnerable. I offer to take

her on my house calls and then to sort out some accommodation for the night. She obliges. It's good to take her mind off it. That's a lot of the job, dealing with clients' crises. How can we expect people to concentrate on recovery when they're on the streets or burdened with worry?

13.30 We visit Mike, James and Sylvia and take them to the allotments. I love the DOMINO projects, the allotments, cookery, guitar lessons. Clients in all stages of recovery can meet, talk and have a laugh – usually at my expense! This plays a huge part in motivating them to enter treatment, particularly when they're in the stage of 'I know I'm looking for something but what am I looking for?' They meet others in similar positions, make friends and encourage each other – recovery is infectious and a huge part of that is belonging. That's one of the most important parts of my job, just being here to talk to. I mingle until I reach Amy. A regular. 'Not right' lately. I'm worried. She doesn't want to talk. I don't push her but tell her to keep reminding herself why she started coming to WGCADA in the first place – she asked for help for a reason. It's often that reason that keeps people coming back and going to treatment. Sometimes this is all we can do, frustrating as it is, but I have comfort in the little seed – plant a seed now and it may germinate straight away or it may take months or even years. But it can and will germinate. We bundle into the car and I drop them home, spirits high.

16.00 Phone calls looking for a place for Joanne, best I can do is a B&B for the night so I wait and settle her in.

17.00 Rush to Cefn Coed, good to see Jenny more coherent after her psychosis. Detox going well, glad to see me, ready for treatment soon.

18.30 Back to the office, paperwork time. Another caffeine fix. Exhaustion! I start thinking about the day. Reliably chaotic, another to follow no doubt! What keeps me here? Madness! It's a privilege really, people enter your life and talk to you, you make brilliant friends both staff and clients, and it's wonderful being part of a good package... I'm only a small cog, but one of many small cogs that turn the big machine, and it does work.

Dave Watkins works at the West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (WGCADA), an abstinence based (12-step) treatment centre in South Wales, that also offers harm reduction services.

'I mockingly shake my finger at her, sighing inside as I wonder what there is left to try with her. I know this much though – never give up, always go the extra mile, or the extra hundred miles as it sometimes turns out! People do get better.'

2 November
A new agenda: moving forward in the post-alcohol strategy
Annual conference includes updates and debate on the alcohol strategy. Speakers from DoH and NTA. Alcohol Concern, London.
t: 020 7928 7377,
e: swilton@alcoholconcern.org.uk

8-11 November
Putting the drugs business out of business
Three-day conference to examine current strategies, structures and practices to tackle the drugs business, including international dimensions. ACPO, Manchester.
t: 0800 542 9585,
w: www.acpodrugs2004.co.uk.

9 November
Symposium on addiction
Includes Dr Adrian Bonner on the role that diet plays in treatment and rehabilitation. Salvation Army, Arbroath.
Contact Major James McCluskey.
t: 01307 469574,
e: james.mcccluskey@salvationarmy.org.

10 November
Alcohol in 2004: why are we pulling in different directions?
The government approach to its strategy, debate on whether these measures will work, which key agencies will need to respond and how they will need to work together. Royal Institute of Public Health, London.
e: marketing@RIPH.org.uk,
t: 020 7580 2731.

15 November
Rural drug & alcohol prevention – a gap in the national strategy
National conference on the need for a robust approach to substance misuse in rural and semi-rural areas. Keynote speaker: Minister for Rural Affairs, RT Hon Alun Michael MP Mentor UK, Coventry.
e: admin@mentoruk.org.

17 November
Drug-related deaths: exploring issues & finding solutions
One-day conference on reducing drug-related deaths. Themes include: setting up confidential inquiry panels, working with injecting drug users to reduce risk of death, ambulance protocol/policy for responding to overdoses, needs of BME com-

munities and deaths in custody. Greater Manchester Ambulance Service NHS Trust, Manchester.
Contact Salman Desai.
t: 01204 492419,
e: info@gmas.nhs.uk.

18-19 November
SSA annual symposium
'Examining legitimacy, competence and effectiveness in primary and secondary care'. Society lecture will be by Professor Griffith Edwards. Society for Study of Addiction, York. Contact Christine Weatherill.
t: 0113 295 1330,
e: training@lau.org.uk.

24 November
Tackling alcohol-related crime – an after-dark problem
One-day conference to discuss how different agencies can work together to tackle alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour in the night-time economy. Capita, London. Contact Jasmin Matharu.
t: 0207 808 5292,
e: jasmin.matharu@capita.co.uk.
w: www.capita-ld.co.uk

24 November
HIV and AIDS treatment
One-day event with presenters from both the HIV and drug and alcohol sectors. Keynote presentation by Dr Mike Youle, Director of HIV Clinical Research at the Royal Free Centre for HIV Medicine. Other speakers include Annette Dale-Perera (NTA), Kathryn Leaf (Cranstoun) and Dr Peter Miller (National Addiction Centre). EATA, London.
t: 020 7922 8753,
e: office@eata.org.uk.

26 November
Binge drinking: problems and responses
Topics cover binge drinking and school students, adults, economics, medical effects, Manchester City Centre Safe Project, reducing trouble in bars, a Canadian approach and harm minimisation. Addictions Forum, Bristol. Contact Addictions Forum at University of the West of England.
t: 0117 328 8800.

3 December
Dual diagnosis: mental health & drug addiction & alcoholism
A detailed look at how the gap between mental health problems and alcoholism and drug

addiction can be addressed, particularly issues arising from differences between health service and voluntary organisations. London.
w: www.conferencesandtraining.com
Reduced rate for FDAP members

7-8 December
NTA national conference
The NTA's second major conference will acknowledge significant improvements in drug treatment in England, identify challenges we still face, and set out the vision for the remaining three years of the current drugs strategy. NTA, London.
w: www.nta.nhs.uk

2005

28 January
Release drugs university IV
'Drugs – the politics, philosophy and economics' – the fourth Release Drugs University will examine the theme of drugs, the law and human rights. Speakers include: Professor Craig Reinerman, University of California; Shami Chakrabarti, Director, Liberty UK; Dr Peter Cohen, University of Amsterdam. Release, London.
w: www.release.org.uk

21-22 February
National drug treatment conference
Two-day annual event. Exchange Conference in association with The Alliance. London. w: www.exchangesupplies.org or contact Monique at Exchange Conferences.
t: 020 7928 9152,
e: moniquetomlinson@wdi.co.uk.

19-21 May
UK/European Symposium on Addictive Disorders
Speakers will include Prof Carlo DiClemente, author or world-renowned research on the impact of treatment for alcoholism. Contact Deirdre Boyd.
e: deirdre@addictiontoday.co.uk

Overseas events
31 October–5 November
47th annual conference of ICAA
'Visions for the Future' will focus on responsive policy making, the media, treatment victories and

challenges, alcohol – the forgotten addiction, and societal impact and accountability. Venice, Italy. International Council on Alcohol and Addiction (ICAA).
t: 0043 2630 33230,
e: icaa.Venice@gmx.at.
w: www.icaa.ch.

1-3 November
6th European conference of European Opiate Addiction Treatment Association
Three-day conference sharing views from European countries (East and West) and the rest of the world, share ideas with colleagues from many different countries and enjoy European culture. EUROPAD, Paris.
e: maremman@med.unipi.it,
w: www.europad.org.

11-14 November
5th Annual national harm reduction conference
Working under fire: drug user health and justice 2004. Housing, medical care, impact of drug use of families, needle exchange programs and new developments in the political and criminal justice arenas. Harm Reduction Coalition. New Orleans, USA. Contact Paul Santiago -
t: +1 212 213 6376 x 15,
e: santiago@harmreduction.org.
w: www.harmreduction.org

25-27 November
7th international symposium on substance abuse treatment
'21st century drug free treatment? Between evidence and belief'. Looking at whether treatment is more or less effective than in the early 1970s, and if not, what we should do. Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research. Denmark.
e: sat@crf.dk.

Weblinks

Alcohol Concern is the national voluntary agency on alcohol misuse. It works to reduce the incidence and costs of alcohol-related harm and to increase the range and quality of services available to people with alcohol-related problems.
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

The **Alcohol Information Scotland** website provides a wide range of information on alcohol for Scotland. This includes statistics, research, publications, key policy documents and practice guidelines as well as links to useful websites. www.alcoholinformation.isdscotland.org

Danos.info provides information, advice and guidance on using the Drugs and Alcohol National Occupational Standards (DANOS) to improve services to substance users. www.danos.info

Drugsalcohol.info is the first regional drugs and alcohol website for professionals in Northern Ireland. www.drugsalcohol.info

The **Drug Misuse Information Scotland** site provides information, statistics and research on drugs misuse in Scotland. Target users are policy makers, professionals, researchers, employers and the wider community. www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org

DrugScope is the UK's leading independent centre of expertise on drugs. It aims to inform policy development and reduce drug-related risk. www.drugscope.org.uk

The **National Treatment Agency (NTA)** is a special health authority, created by the Government in 2001 to improve the availability, capacity and effectiveness of treatment for drug misuse in England. www.nta.nhs.uk

Tackling Drugs is the cross-government drug strategy website for drug professionals and others interested in the strategy. Content includes publications, events, Drug Action Team Directory, public drugs campaign resources, press releases and the national drug strategy. www.drugs.gov.uk

Please email details
of your events to:
office@fdap.org.uk