

The Dublin drug treatment court 10 years on – where to next?

?

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Background

- Establishment of DTC 2001
- Evaluation 2002 – recommends extension
- Review of 2005 calls for it to be made permanent
- Programme for government 2007-2012
commitment to expand subject to further review given low number of referrals and graduations

Comptroller & Auditor General report 2009

“The effectiveness of the DTC needs to be evaluated, now that a significant period of operation has elapsed. The evaluation should compare the cost & effectiveness of the Court with the cost & effectiveness of orders made by other courts that include treatment of those sentenced to community-based orders. This should help identify the most appropriate way to develop the service the service in the future”

Review terms of reference

- Why so few people going through DTC?
- How to increase throughput?
- Whether further expansion desirable given poor results?

Pilot drug court terms of reference 2001

- Offender must be 18 years or older
- Reside in Dublin 1 for one year
- Have pleaded guilty or found guilty of non-violent offence
- Be liable to be sentenced to prison if convicted
- Be drug dependent including prescribed drugs
- Have clear understanding of DTC implications
- Willing to cooperate with supervision/stop offending/avail of drug treatment & generally participate in programme

Resources

- Judge
- Drugs court coordinator
- Probation officer
- Garda
- Nurse
- Community welfare officer
- Education coordinator
 - Some part-time using pre-existing resources

DTC Programme

- Attend court as required
- Provide regular urine samples
- Work with social services
- Attend treatment (including psychiatric)
- Attend counselling sessions
- Attend probation sessions
- Pursue educational and/or training programmes

Three phases

- **Stabilisation and orientation**
 - Reduce drug use, improve health, cease crime, engage in counselling, initiate career plan, meet team appointments
- **Continuation and progression**
 - Cease drug use except cannabis, cease use non-prescription drugs, maintain good health, stabilise home,, pro-social & anti-criminal attitude and behaviour, work on career plan, address life and addiction issues
- **Reintegration and self-management**
 - Drug free, manage relapse, no crime, pro-social & anti-crime, work commitment, manage home and relationships, future plan on graduation

Costs and outcomes

- Annual cost 2001 – 2009 €300,000
- 2001-2009 379 referrals (Average about 40 PA)
- 155 unsuitable (90% outside catchment)
- 224 proceed to phase 1
- 29 graduations
- Significant reduction in offending
- Weekly cost of DTC €152
- Weekly cost of prison €1,783

Why low referrals?

- Offenders under 18 excluded
- Offences involving violence excluded
- Offenders can only be referred post-sentence
- Judges/ solicitors unaware of DTC option
- Lack of management support and resources
- Must be in catchment area

Ministerial statement 24th May 2010

“Drug treatment courts can make an important contribution as a restorative justice measure but international studies also indicate they need to evolve and develop on an ongoing basis. This review stems from my concern...about the very low throughput of participants despite dedicated team and goodwill of agencies involved. I am pleased that the report has identified recommendations which should lead to a marked improvement in programme’s throughput and effectiveness”

Future of DTC

- To continue for 2 years with interim review
- Improve synergy with judges of other courts & develop referral protocol
- Provide management support to coordinator
- Advisory team from agencies to assist judge and DTC team
- Remove catchment area boundaries
- Allow admission of borderline cases (violent?)
- Consider referrals 16-18 year old's
- Review data so to monitor and assess future progress
- Develop primary research capacity

Discussion

Is the Dublin DTC an example of policy makers trying to carve success out of failure or does it represent a failure to appreciate how success should be measured in the context of drug addiction, social development and offending behaviour??