

## The Role of Medical Professionals in Imparting Drug Abuse Education to Secondary School Children

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**Abstract :** Objectives: Research on drug abuse education in secondary schools has highlighted the discrepancy between drug policies and practice. Drug abuse is closely associated with child mental health, and with increasing drug overdose deaths in the UK, approximately doubling in the last 30 years, it becomes important to revolutionise drug abuse education. Medical professionals from the University of Nottingham piloted a drug abuse workshop at a state school in Nottingham for children between the age of 14-15 years. An interactive and educational approach was implemented, which explained addiction from a medical perspective. The workshop aimed to debunk medical beliefs children harboured about drugs and to support children in making informed drug choices. Methods: The sample group consisted of six cohorts of 30 children from year 10. The workshop was delivered in three segments to each cohort. In the first segment, the children were introduced to the physiological mechanisms behind drug dependence and reward pathways. The second segment consisted of interactive discussions between the children and medical professionals. This also involved conversations between the children about their perspectives on drug abuse, thereby co-creating knowledge. The third segment used art to incorporate storytelling from the perspective of a year ten child. This exercise investigated the causes that led children to abuse drugs. A feedback questionnaire was distributed among the children to analyse the impact of the workshop. Results: The children answered eight questions. 56% agreed/strongly agreed that they found being taught by medical professionals effective. 50% disagreed, strongly disagreed, or felt neutral that they had received sufficient education about drug abuse previously. Notably, 20% agreed that they feel more likely to ask for help from a medical professional or organisation if they need it. Conclusion: The results highlighted the relevance of medical professionals to function as peer educators in drug abuse education to secondary school children. This would build trust between children and the medical profession within the community. However, a minority proportion of children showed keenness to seek support from medical professionals or organisations for their mental health if they needed it. This exposed the anxiety children have in coming forward to seek professional help. In order to work towards a child-centred approach, educational policies and practices need to align. Similar workshops and research may need to be conducted to expose different perspectives toward drug abuse education.

**Keywords :** adolescent mental health, evidence-based teaching, drug abuse awareness, medical professional led workshops

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