



***To restart from the person:
Drug addiction services in Rome***

I am Dr. Massimo Canu, Director of the Drug Addiction Municipal Agency, a body of the Rome Municipal Administration.

Today I would like to bring you the greetings of Mayor Gianni Alemanno, who has appointed me as a delegate for this congress to represent the city of Rome.

I am proud to represent the operative model carried out by Rome Municipal Administration, as well as all the efforts that have been made to fight and prevent the spreading of drugs and to treat people.

Drug addiction policies in the city of Rome have been shifting in a radical and successful way in the past four years. The Drug Addiction Municipal Agency has been the leading institution for drug addiction policies and for the treatment of distress and deviance in Rome since 1998, and it coordinates a network of services aimed at providing reception, support and social reintegration.

During the past few years, in addition to the traditional policies of treatment and medical care, the Agency has carried out primary and secondary prevention strategies, aimed at promoting health and well-being through healthy lifestyles, thus establishing Rome as a cutting-edge city in the field of drug addiction policies.

The adoption of the aforementioned policies has caused a profound change with respect to the methods used in the past, when 80% of the services were based on a “damage reduction” strategy. This attitude had turned Rome into the Italian city with the highest rate of drug related deaths, 72% more compared to the average of the other Italian cities (data referred to the 2005-2008 four-year period).

This turnabout has been implemented by the Agency in accordance with the European Union Drugs Strategy Action Plan (2009-2012), and the guidelines proposed by the Family, Education and Youth Department of the Rome Municipal Administration, responsible for the monitoring of drug-addiction and the administration of the related services.

Since 2009, the Agency has, in fact, devised, planned and carried out the “New Framework for Municipal Services”. This allowed a rethinking and readjustment of the



services offered locally, which have thus become higher quality and better targeted to the needs and demands of all those involved, directly or indirectly, with the problem of drug addiction.

Drug addiction is a highly complex issue, also because it constantly changes. It was necessary to offer differentiated and target-oriented services, in order to face phenomena such as multiple drug-addiction and dual diagnosis, and to readjust the Agency's services in accordance with new drugs and with the new contexts of drug consumption, which involve all age ranges. In order to do that, it was necessary to start afresh from the concept of "person", and to adopt a practical strategy focused on protection, full recovery and well-being, with special concern for young people and families.

The "New Framework for Municipal Services" provides for the implementation of nineteen new services in the territory of Rome, which means an increase of 26.7% in terms of figures, and thus guarantees a bigger reception capacity at the Agency's facilities. Furthermore, new "intermediate threshold" services have been introduced with the aim of filling a gap often noticed in the field of drug addiction treatment, i.e. the lack of facilities providing a link between "low threshold" services and "high threshold" services. These facilities are necessary to start up a therapeutic and rehabilitation chain, and to ensure a holistic vision of the care and treatment of the individual.

The adoption of the aforementioned operative strategies has produced surprising and very important results. First of all, a 13.9% decrease, from 2009 to 2012, of active drug-addicted consumers in the Drug Services. Secondly, a drastic decrease of 56.8% in drug related deaths (figure provided by the Central Directorate for the Drug Services of the Ministry of the Interior, obtained by comparing the data of the 2005-2008 and the 2009-2012 four-year periods).

While maintaining a suitable commitment to care, work rehabilitation and reintegration into society, a number of brand new, experimental prevention services have been set up. In particular, the first Italian Youth Community financed by a local authority, designed for young people aged between fourteen and thirty-five. The project aims to organize social, educational and recreational life in order to encourage maturity and self-awareness among young people, in a context of respect and self-respect; it has thus becoming a reference point for young people, their families and the local community.



Furthermore, a new “Service for the Prevention of risky behavior and the promotion of healthy life styles” has been set up. It is intended to be a youth meeting place aimed at both drug abuse prevention and drug rehabilitation, where sport is promoted not only as an occasion for social encounters and entertainment, but also as a growth process for the personality of the young athletes.

With regard to prevention, an enormous investment has been made in measures for high school students, using the “peer education” method and the training of opinion leaders. Furthermore, the great potential of the Internet and social networks has been exploited, since the web is the best place to get in touch with young people and involve them. In order to achieve this goal, a website and blog have been set up to reach the people most involved in the new social media, and to enhance their awareness. At the same time, the Agency’s website has undergone a complete renovation, thus becoming a more effective tool that works together with the Agency’s official profiles on the main social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube.

A very important role is also played by the “Toll-free number – Listening, Information and Counseling”, a service set up to lend an ear and to offer telephone counseling so that users can identify useful resources to deal with the situation in an effective way.

In addition to the aforementioned services, an important sign of innovation is the introduction of the “Burn-Out” service, aimed at all the healthcare and welfare workers involved in implementing the services and in planning activities. This service is aimed at offering support and a secure point of reference for all the workers, so that they can maintain a high motivational and professional level and avoid “burn-out” phenomena. The introduction of this tool aims at improving the progress of the different activities, apart from encouraging the accomplishment of the team’s qualitative and quantitative goals.

Furthermore, some important goals have been achieved with regard to transparency and administrative effectiveness:

- The Agency has devised and set up a system for the monitoring of addictions called “G.I.A.N.O. – Integrated Management, Analysis and Counseling”. This system is designed both to standardize data collection by defining the indicators and the monitoring and assessment techniques, and to centralize information and share the rehabilitation pathway of each person involved in the service system. This enables the real time monitoring of the outcomes of services and treatments



that have been provided, together with relevant information regarding the type of users that make use of the service. G.I.A.N.O. has allowed for a better management of human and structural resources employed in the services, thanks to the monitoring of the current relationship between the cost of the services and the treatments offered, apart from the effectiveness of the treatments themselves, thus helping the rationalization of both actions and resources.

- For the same purpose, the Agency has replaced the former financial accounting method, with a paper format, with the “CONCORDIA – Control, Accounting and Administration” software created to provide a more correct management of the expenses related to the drug addiction services, through the development of computerized procedures. Apart from a considerable savings in terms of economic, time and environmental resources, the software has assured an increased effectiveness and rationalization of public administration expenses.
- Furthermore, the Agency has set up the E³ software - Effectiveness, Efficiency and Economy, with the aim of optimizing human and economic resources of the public administration. This program provides facilities designed to help the workers to respect the aforementioned principles, so that the workers themselves are encouraged to use public resources in the most efficient and effective way and to produce documents in electronic rather than in paper format.

The important results obtained by the Drug Addiction Municipal Agency also include the field of scientific research. In fact, even with the help of the GIANO software, it has been possible to carry out the “Minerva” research, in collaboration with The “Sapienza” University of Rome and with the European University. The study involved the analysis of addiction behavior, in particular during adolescence, by using a multifactorial, interactionist and systemic model. The study is focused on the quantitative analysis of consumption behavior and on the analysis of the processes that facilitate non-adaptive growth. This approach has provided a better understanding of the complexity of growth processes, because it not only analyzes the psychophysiological aspects, but also the network of relationships of the adolescents and the knowledge, meanings and expectations related to the use of drugs.

The Agency published the results obtained from Minerva questionnaire administered in 2012, on the occasion of the report “To prevent, welcome and rehabilitate, for a life free from drugs”. This research, still in progress, is unique on the national scene, having



been conducted on about 50,000 young people aged between thirteen and thirty, thus providing the largest statistical sample in Italy concerning the study and knowledge of the phenomenon of legal and illegal drugs, and of the associated relational, emotional and family aspects.

A particularly interesting factor concerns the adolescents' different approaches to drugs in connection with the bond with their parents. As regards the bond with the mother, it is particularly interesting to note that young people who do not use the substances (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and others) show a higher rate of confidence in the mother/child relationship than the one emerging in the groups of habitual and occasional consumers.

As regards the bond with the father, the groups of young people who do not drink alcohol and do not consume cannabis and other drugs, show higher rates of confidence in their fathers than habitual and occasional consumers.

As regards the relationship between multiple consumption and parental bonding, the study brings out the fact that consumers who use more substances simultaneously show less confidence in the relationship with the mother and the father than the ones who do not use any kind of substance.

Among the various aspects related to the use of legal and illegal substances by adolescents and young adults, we can cite "sensation seeking": the report noted that, among the survey's sample, habitual consumers of the substances being investigated (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and others), showed higher average rates than the ones obtained by non-consumers.

At the present time, the Agency is still administering the "Minerva" questionnaire and collecting data. These activities are continuing and will be carried out extensively in the next years, in order to carry on the constant research and publication activity of the Agency. This choice springs from the need to study risk and protective factors related to the use of substances during adolescence, in order to be able to draw up specific target-oriented action plans.

In the light of the important results obtained up until now, we have to look at the future in order to deal with the constantly changing and complex challenge represented by drug addiction. As the "Minerva" project carried out by the Agency also suggests, the continuous changes in our society and the many variations and facets that characterize the phenomenon of drug addiction, make it necessary to maintain constant



involvement in this field, which should hopefully be grounded on the foundations laid up until now.

It is of paramount importance to carry on the work done up to now, work geared to integrate clinical treatment and scientific research, in order to guarantee a constant evolution of both the Agency and its services, which should continuously expand and adapt as already happened in the recent past.

The future lies in the ambitious but necessary goal of expanding the competences of the Drug Addiction Municipal Agency, in order to promote and support innovative and differentiated services, shaped on both traditional dependences and on the new types of consumers, the new contexts of drug use and the new forms of dependence such as behavioral addictions (for instance pathological gambling, internet addiction disorder, social network addiction, compulsive buying disorder, eating disorders and so on).

We therefore plan to widen our sphere of activity to carry out preschool-oriented actions and preventive and education initiatives for teachers, families and for those who work in the field of drug addiction. By doing so, we will be able to deal with relational and behavioral problems and to intervene in an increasingly precocious way, because these problems are clear signs of distress anticipating likely deviant behavior.

To sum up, now more than ever, we cannot just take action limited to the field of drug addictions, seen as if they were a single category. Only by widening our perspectives, and hence the entire range of services, we can clearly and unanimously formulate an unequivocal message, that is to say fighting drugs and every form of pathological dependence, in favor of the emancipation of the individual, for a truly free person.

Massimo Canu

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