

Commentary

November 8, 2010

New Report Identifies HOPE Probation as an Innovative Approach for Successful Future Demand Reduction

The Mexican drug violence is funded by billions of dollars from American drug users. Legalization of marijuana in the United States would increase drug use in this country further building violent drug trafficking from Mexico. What can be done to curb the flow of money from the US to the Mexican drug cartels? In a recent paper issued by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Peter Reuter, Ph.D. analyzes the limitations of current strategies to make dramatic reductions in illegal drug use rates.¹ He highlights one program which could turn the tide of money flowing to cartels by reducing drug use among the highest using and most problem-generating segment of the US population over the next five years.

Dr. Reuter reviews prevention, treatment and law enforcement concluding that there are few strategies in the areas of treatment and enforcement for further reducing drug demand. He then identifies coerced abstinence and mandatory desistance using random drug testing linked to swift and certain consequences targeting the 5 million convicted felons released to the community as the one strategy with great promise for reducing drug use and demand.

The combination of mandated abstinence from illegal drugs and certain, immediate, short-term sanctions for any illegal drug use or other violations of probation and parole have been pioneered over the past 6 years by Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE). HOPE has successfully been implemented for all types of offenders in Hawaii yielding impressive results.

In a randomized control study comparing probationers in HOPE and individuals in standard probation, HOPE participants were 55% less likely to be arrested for a new crime, 72% less likely to use drugs, 61% less likely to miss appointments with their supervisory officer and 53% less likely to have their probation revoked.² HOPE probationers also spent or were sentenced to on average 48% fewer days of incarceration.

As Dr. Reuter, ever the cautious researcher, concludes, "If HOPE were implemented on a wide scale nationally, it might cut consumption of cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine substantially. HOPE, then, is the program with the most promise to aid Mexico in the near future."

The Institute for Behavior and Health, Inc. (IBH) supports Dr. Reuter's assertion and advocates the rapid expansion of the HOPE program to help make significant reductions in the US demand

for drugs. Not only will this strategy produce significant reductions in the US funding of Mexican drug violence, but it will also reduce crime and reduce the high rate and cost of incarceration in this country. Visit www.ibhinc.org for more information on HOPE and how this innovative program can be a game-changer in the US and Mexico.

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¹ Reuter, P. (2010, July). How can domestic U.S. drug policy help Mexico? Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Mexico Institute; Trans-Border Institute, University of San Diego.

² Hawken, A. & Kleiman, M. (2009, December). Managing drug involved probationers with swift and certain sanctions: Evaluating Hawaii's HOPE. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. Award No. 2007-IJ-CX-0033.