

PALM - A Therapeutic Community or Not?



History Of PALM

- PALM – Program for Adolescent life Management.
- Research commenced into creating an evidence based program with the resulting monographs 26 “The nature and treatment of adolescent substance abuse” (Spooner, Mattick and Howard 1996) and subsequently Monograph 40 (Spooner, Mattick and Noffs 1999)

Evolution of PALM

- Originally a residential program with some elements of a TC
- Over the years incorporated more TC approaches
- Four PALMS with varying approaches but with an underlying philosophy.
- Modified TC?? Adolescent TC??

ATCA Definition

- A Therapeutic Community is a treatment facility in which the community itself, through self-help and mutual support, is the principal means for promoting personal change.
- In a therapeutic community, residents and staff participate in the management and operation of the community, contributing to a psychologically and physically safe learning environment where change can occur.
- In a therapeutic community, there is a focus on the biopsychosocial, emotional and spiritual dimensions of substance use, with the use of the community to heal individuals and support the development of behaviours, attitudes and values of healthy living.

European Federation of Therapeutic Communities

Core/service Standards

- The Whole Community meets regularly
- All Community members work alongside each other on a day to day basis.
- All community members share social time together.
- Members of the community share meals together
- Community members take a variety of roles and levels of responsibility.

European Federation of Therapeutic Communities

Core/service Standards

- Informal aspects of everyday living are integral to the work of the community.
- All community members can discuss any aspects of life within the community.
- All community members regularly examine their attitudes and feelings towards each other.
- All community members share responsibility for each other.
- All community members create an emotionally safe environment for the work of the community.

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Core/service Standards

- Community members are involved in the selection of new staff members.
- All community members participate in the process of a new client member joining the community.
- Community members are involved in making plans with a client member for when he or she completes the program.
- There is an understanding and tolerance of disturbed behaviour and emotional expression.

European Federation of Therapeutic Communities Core/service Standards

- Positive risk taking is seen as an essential part of the process of change.
- The therapeutic community has a clear set of boundaries limits or rules which are understood by all members.

TC components of program

- PAL/Assistant PAL
- Buddy
- Assigns chores/recreation
- Structured and organised
- House Meetings - community/own
- Open Handovers
- Open Case conferences
- Feedback to staff/ residents in am and pm meetings



TC components of program cont.

- Input from and to staff/residents action plans
- Conflict resolutions by whole community
- Natural consequences to community
- Input into re-entry of ex residents
- Residents facilitating groups
- Promoting pressure to change behaviour with each other
- H&I Meeting



Cultures, mindset promoted

- Promoting staff and residents to work alongside
- Consulting with residents for input into program
- Promoting residents to challenge, support and be accountable to each other (including with staff)
- Support from WHO's
- Encouraging to always look for the opportunity to use TC principles in any interaction, incident that occurs
- Is a mindset and attitude that often only comes from watching, learning and promoted – otherwise can fall back easily



Obstacles

- A lack of knowledge and experience among staff with T.C. approaches
- Highly disordered residents but also issues of “normal” adolescence
- Less maturity, less skills, principle of *doli incapax*

legal

- Aim for program graduates is not a fully independent, functional adult. Age appropriate
- Staff and wider society have a responsibility to “parent” adolescents
- Legislated Child Protection and Duty of Care responsibilities
- Criticism of supervision and fear of legal ramifications – a “blame” culture

Towards a Learning Culture

- Education and training of staff on the advantages of T.C. approaches
- Model greater openness and honesty
- Greater emphasis on all aspects of the culture of the program

- All critical incidents reviewed by team with emphasis on structural and environmental solutions not staff performance
- 360 degree Performance Appraisals
- Senior (or ex) residents on interview panels