

York home to more than 60,000 drug addicts, reports show

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of Toronto doctors, Peter Garber and Mark Greenberg, of Toronto's York Steeles Clinical Associates, began to offer it at a methadone clinic they operate.

The Oak Ridges centre is only the second clinic in Canada known to offer the procedure.

It's a procedure Daiter says he dismissed when he first heard about it three years ago, thinking it was just something clinics south of the border were doing to make money.

In the United States, the price can range from \$7,000 to \$10,000.

Some patients have even abused the process. By first cleansing the body through rapid detoxification, a drug user's system is ripe for the ultimate high, which would resemble their first encounter with drugs.

"Someone could potentially misuse the program to get opiate naive to have that first hit and really get off," said Dr. David Teplin, a clinical psychologist at the Oak Ridges clinic.

But when patients started asking for rapid detoxification, the doctors decided to conduct more research.

And with an estimated 60,000 opiate addicts in the GTA — a figure reported to be underestimated by 50 per cent — the physicians at the Oak Ridges clinic say the demand for such a treatment program does exist.

Nine months after their research began, the doctors were ready to launch a program with strict rules for admission.

In fact, the most likely candidate for rapid detoxification isn't your garden variety heroine addict, Teplin says.

The patients with a high chance for success are

people like Derek — relatively stable individuals who have become addicted to pain killers and other opiates.

Clients must go through numerous psychological and physical tests before being approved for the procedure. And after care includes regular twice-weekly supervised urine testing, weekly individual or group counselling sessions and regular medical follow-up.

And while the cost may seem prohibitive at \$4,500, Varenbut says it is a barrier that prompts addicts to really ask themselves whether they are ready to get clean.

"If they have to sell their motorcycle or borrow from their parents or set a certain amount aside each month, it means they're serious," he said. Future candidates may come from the Oak Ridges Addiction Centre's methadone clinic, where 250 patients currently receive treatment.

Those dabbling in more than one substance are less likely to find salvation through rapid detoxification.

"If we get rid of the opiate, they will just go back to hitting the coke," said Teplin, pointing out that 20 to 40 per cent of clients in the methadone clinic also use cocaine.

"Methadone allows people to lead productive lives but they are never free of it. There are no ups and downs of withdrawal and they are not totally fixed on where they will get their next hit."

A patient may be able to slowly

detoxify using methadone for one to two years, but going cold turkey off something such as heroine is considered almost inhumane.

"Rapid detox offers a good alternative to the person who can't commit time to methadone," said Daiter. "It's really four hours and three days. Rapid detox is for someone who can say, 'I know I have a problem and I don't want anyone to know about it.'"

Experts in the field are divided on the virtues of rapid detoxification.

The Addiction Research Foundation says it doesn't support programs like the one at Oak Ridges because it hasn't been proven effective over time.

And while the procedure knocks the opiate out of the system, it doesn't do anything for the craving of the drug.

"I still have a lot of work to do," Derek admits. "I'd like to think this will all be gone in the next 12 months, but I may also face this for the rest of my life."

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