

Commentary

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Student Drug Testing Programs Make Strides Abroad; Continue to Thrive in United States

While schools across the United States have continued to implement student drug testing programs as part of comprehensive programs to deter illegal drug use, countries abroad have recently initiated similar steps, implementing new testing programs. While policies and procedures may vary from country to country, there is a uniformity of purpose in these random student drug testing (RSDT) programs that schools across the world are implementing: to reduce the dangerous problem of youth drug use.

Earlier this year, voluntary RSDT programs were approved in Northland, New Zealand.¹ Unlike traditional RSDT programs in the U.S., these programs are specifically designed for students who have previously been in trouble for drug use. Students sign a contract to receive counseling and become subject to random drug tests for one year. In a country where youth methamphetamine use is dangerously high, this program offers students who both want and need help the chance to become and stay drug-free.

Sweden, one of Europe's leaders in creating effective demand reduction and restrictive drug policies, has taken steps to implement pilot volunteer RSDT programs in select schools this year. Open to all students in these schools, these pilot programs are not Sweden's first school-based drug testing policies. Currently many public schools in Sweden drug test students based on suspicion of recent drug use.² However, connecting social services to both suspicion-based and random drug testing programs is a new, important goal that is being implemented to help these at-risk students.

Another emerging leader in student drug testing is Russia, whose president, Dmitry Medvedev proposed mandatory drug tests this year for all students.³ Under his plan, drug tests would become a standard procedure for all Russian students to undergo as part of routine medical examinations before the school year begins. While this would be a scheduled, one-time test, it nonetheless sends a powerful message to students and their parents with regard to drug use in this population.

RSDT programs are also popping up in Hong Kong where districts are setting up voluntary, random testing procedures for all students.⁴ Secretary for Justice Wong Yan Lung recently spoke in favor of the new trial of RSDT programs.⁵

Finally, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, President of Philippines, expressed strong support of RSDT programs in both public and private high schools and colleges across the country, which were scheduled to begin this year.⁶ The Philippines Dangerous Drugs Board chairman Vicente Sotto

III also supports the shift in improved prevention measures and said, “Preventing drug testing is a violation of human rights because you are preventing the government to cure drug dependence.”⁷

Implementation of new RSDT programs is a process that will evolve and spread internationally, just as it has in the United States, as schools and organizations come together to identify effective ways to reduce youth drug use. Each of the aforementioned countries has unique histories, policies, and approaches to drug abuse; however, they are all embracing RSDT as a new method to impact student drug use. The Institute for Behavior and Health (IBH), a long-standing supporter of non-punitive RSDT programs in schools paired with strong drug education programs and prevention programs, is pleased to see this important drug abuse prevention program spreading across the globe.

For more information about RSDT, visit IBH sites: www.PreventionNotPunishment.org and www.ibhinc.org.

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² National Association Drug-Free Society. RNS Drug Policies. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=sv&u=http://www.rns.se/Om.aspx&ei=TaDUSoKGGMXM8Qbc2_yDDQ&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=3&ct=result&ved=0CBgQ7gEwAg&prev=/search%3Fq%3Drns%2Bsweden%2Bper%2Bjohansson%2Blinda%2Bnilsson%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26hs%3Def4 .

³ AFP. (2009, Oct 8). Russian teens to be tested for drugs at school. *The Independent*. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/russian-teens-to-be-tested-for-drugs-at-school-1799405.html>.

⁴ Tai Po in spotlight as student drug tests trigger concerns. (2009, Aug 6). *The Standard*. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from http://www.thestandard.com.hk/news_detail.asp?pp_cat=15&art_id=85890&sid=24803825&con_type=1

⁵ Hong Kong Information Services Department. (2009, Aug 21). Tests hinder student drug abuse: legal chief. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from <http://sc.info.gov.hk/gb/news.gov.hk/en/category/lawandorder/090821/html/090821en08002.htm>

⁶ Merueñas, M. (2009, Jan 13). Arroyo orders random drug testing in schools nationwide. *GMA News*. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from <http://www.preventionnotpunishment.org/pdfs/GMANewsTVArroyoordersrandomdrugtestinginschoolsnationwide.pdf>

⁷ Merueñas, M. Stopping random drug testing is a human rights violation - Sotto. (2009, Jan 16). *GMA News*. Retrieved October 13, 2009 from <http://www.preventionnotpunishment.org/pdfs/GMANewsTVStoppingrandomdrugtestingisahumanrightsviolation.pdf>