METHADONE MISINFORMATION AND MISCONCEPTIONS

We read with interest your special section on the Black Panther Party. As contemporaries of many of the personalities profiled, and as chief executive officer and corporate compliance officer of a large minority-controlled private not-for-profit substance abuse treatment program located in New York City that has been in operation since 1969, we have interacted with many of them.

Because of this, we were taken aback when reading the following statement by Silvers in “Genuine Struggle and Care: An Interview With Cleo Silvers”:

One in four people in the South Bronx and Harlem at that time were addicted to heroin. This was another issue. There was one drug rehabilitation program in the South Bronx and one in Harlem, and both of them used methadone as the method of helping people addicted to heroin. We know the horrors of the use of methadone and all the horrible things that happen to people. Their bones become brittle; it eats the bone marrow. It was the worst possible chemical to use to help people with drug rehabilitation. It seemed that there were other ways, more positive ways to assist people with drug addiction.

In fact, methadone has been history’s most studied pharmaceutical; the horror stories about methadone have been debunked; methadone is the most effective treatment of opiate abuse and government agencies have increased funding to methadone treatment programs in response to the pandemic of heroin addiction. The myths Silvers expressed should have been removed from her rhetoric long ago.

Given the stigmatization associated with substance use disorders, especially addiction to opioids and its treatment, particularly in communities of color, Silvers’s comments are a stinging rebuke of the work that has been done in programs like ours, and serves to perpetuate the stigma. For our agency, START Treatment and Recovery Centers, where we have also provided primary care, including HIV and hepatitis C care, and have been and continue to be involved in clinical research on substance abuse, HIV, and hepatitis C treatment, Silvers’s rhetoric is not helpful.

One theme highlighted in this Special Section is the collaborations the Black Panther Party negotiated to bring needed services to communities lacking them. The problems continue and it is detrimental to denigrate agencies like the one we have been proud to have served for more than 30 years. These communities still need all the help we can muster from as many sources as possible, especially agencies providing treatment with recognized and proven therapies.

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REFERENCES


Editor’s Note

Nelson declined to respond.

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