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A safer high [1]

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A rational approach to the hardcore heroin addicts is proving somewhat successful [3]. A pilot scheme that has been running for the past two years has seen drug use and drug related crime fall among those undergoing treatment. The treatment involves two thirds of patients taking methadone (half orally, half injecting) and the remaining third injecting diamorphine (pure heroin) all under the watchful gaze of nurses, doctors and counsellors. This amassed support has helped many users back to a more stable life and a way of coping with their addiction.

This clinical version of supplying legalized heroin has cut the amount of crime normally associated with addicts. As Professor John Strang, of the National Addiction Centre, pointed out, about 40 percent of users had "quit their involvement with the street scene completely. Of those who have continued, which obviously is a disappointment, it goes down from every day to about four days per month.? Whilst it hasn?t totally cut crime, it has reduced it significantly and this is just as important for both users and society in general. This isn?t a cheap process; the treatment costs around £9,000 to £15,000 per patient but this is more than borne out by the reduced costs in policing and prosecuting their crimes.

The government has taken a very practical approach to the problem and has seen that 'legalizing' drugs can be done in a safe way and has many benefits, not just to the user but to society. Perhaps they could extend this to other drugs and remove them from the streets so as to be in direct competition with the current sellers. In future the government could pay for the treatment of those that become heavily addicted, or indeed suffer a bad reaction to the drug of their choice, through taxing the sale of drugs. Not only would drug legalization reduce crime overall but it would also mean that a large swathe of our society need never be in contact with the criminal element.

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