

Wellness courts eye new drug to help drinkers wanting to quit

Among treatment tools tribal wellness courts can use with clients is Naltrexone, a drug newly approved to help people quit drinking.

Below are answers to common questions about the drug. The information is from the pamphlet "Guidelines for the Use of Naltrexone in the Treatment of Alcoholism," published by the APT Foundation in New Haven, Conn.

■ What is Naltrexone?

Naltrexone is a medication that blocks the effects of drugs known as opioids (which includes morphine, heroin or codeine). It competes with these drugs for opioid receptors in the brain. It was originally used to treat dependence on opioid drugs but has recently been approved by the FDA to treat alcoholism.

In clinical trials evaluating effectiveness of Naltrexone, patients who received Naltrexone were twice as successful in remaining abstinent and in avoiding relapse as patients who received placebo (an inactive pill).

■ Why does Naltrexone help for alcoholism?

Reports from successfully treated patients suggest three kinds of effects. First, Naltrexone can reduce craving, which is the urge or desire to drink. Second, Naltrexone helps patients remain abstinent. Third, Naltrexone can interfere with the tendency to want to drink more if a recovering patient slips and has a drink.

■ Does this mean that Naltrexone will "sober me up" if I drink?

No, Naltrexone does not reduce effects of alcohol that impair coordination and judgment.

■ If I take Naltrexone, does it mean that I don't need other treatment for alcoholism?

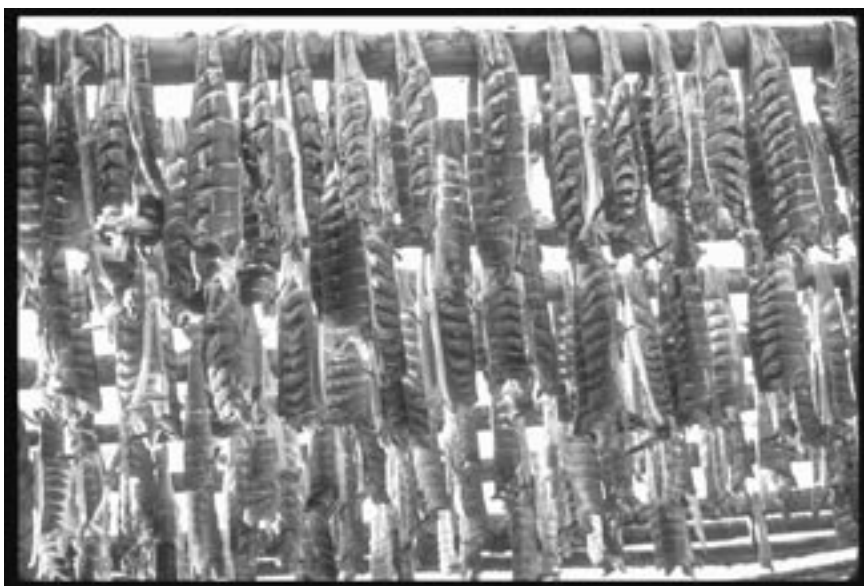
No, Naltrexone is only one component of a program of treatment for alcoholism including counseling, help with associated psychological and social problems and participation in self-help groups.

■ What does it feel like to be on Naltrexone?

Aside from side effects, which are usually short-lived and mild, patients usually report they are largely unaware of being on medication. Naltrexone usually has no psychological effects and patients don't feel either "high" or "down." It is not addictive. While it does seem to reduce alcohol craving, it does not interfere with the experience of other types of pleasure.

■ What is the relationship of Naltrexone to AA?

There is no contradiction between participation in AA and taking naltrexone. Naltrexone is not addictive and does not produce any "high" or pleasant effects. It can contribute to achievement of an abstinence goal by reducing the craving or compulsion to drink, particularly during early phases of recovery. It is most likely to be effective when the patient's goal is to stop drinking altogether.



Wellness Court Project art contest "honorable mentions" worth a look

These photos, also submitted for the Wellness Court Project's art contest, earned honorable mention. The photos will also appear in the wellness court manual.

The top photo, by Sherri Amaktoolik of Golovin, shows Frances Wright and granddaughter Wilma Amaktoolik at Solomon fish camp. All the photos to the left are by Eleanor Sarren of Unalakleet. They show, from top to bottom: Masengah Sarren hanging fish, scrimshaw artist Joe Blachford, and hanging strips. The top two smaller photos above were also submitted by Sarren. They show Johnny Sarren hanging fish, and Rose Towarak smelting. The bottom photo above, submitted by Loretta Millet of Unalakleet, shows her grandson Dominick Lozada helping to pick vegetables.

