



MINISTRY OF
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND HEALTH
Valtakunnallinen terveydenhuollon eettinen
neuvottelukunta (ETENE)

MEMORANDUM

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June 10th, 2002

Ritva Halila

OPINION OF THE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD ON HEALTH CARE ETHICS ON THE MEMORANDUM OF THE WORKING GROUP ASSIGNED TO DEFINE THE USE OF DRUG TESTS

The proposal deals with a very important and topical theme. Use of drugs and other intoxicants is increasing in Finland and this is linked with considerable health, psychological and economic harms and security risks. Detecting drug use by valid tests and elimination of related risks, as well as creating appropriate treatment options for substance abusers are important and urgent issues from the ethical point of view.

The request for opinion addressed to ETENE is dated 25 May although the memorandum of the Working Group was completed much earlier. Since the Advisory Board is broad-based forum including various expertise, a thorough processing of issues takes a long time. Due to the short period of preparation the Advisory Board has not been able to discuss the memorandum taking account of all possible considerations. In case a more detailed statement is desired, the Advisory Board should be given much more time for preparing it.

For the time being the Advisory Board has viewed the matter above all from the perspective of health care and wishes to stress in particular the following:

The aspiration to reduce and prevent drug use and to treat abusers is ethically important for, i.a., the following reasons:

- drug use causes considerable problems for the users themselves, the people close to them, their unborn children, the immediate community and society and, moreover, it is a serious security risk to society and the general public;
- in working life drug use is a safety issue, in some jobs in a very critical way, e.g. in traffic and health care professions;
- drug use is linked with many serious social problems, such as crime and prostitution;
- it has to be kept in mind that in quantitative terms the biggest and economically the most considerable substance abuse problem is still alcohol abuse.

From the ethical point of view the most important aspect in the matter is that the tests must be carried out within the framework of health care services. The tests should be made as competently and correctly as possible. All essential ethical principles must be observed in the testing, including expertise, reliability, confidentiality, security, and protection of the client's human dignity and interests in terms of care.

It is important that the screenings are targeted, i.e. based on defined criteria, which are listed in the law. From the point of view of health care it is important to emphasise that when carrying out the tests substance abusers should at the same time be offered care options. It is a good thing that the employer arranging drugs tests is obligated to prepare an anti-drug action plan. Particular attention should be paid to vulnerable and dependent groups, such as young trainees and job applicants. Faulty test results and possibilities of misleading should be eliminated to as great an extent as possible.

ETENE appreciates the idea included in Professor Helena Taskinen's supplementing opinion that the preparation of anti-drug action plans and the performing of tests presupposes in practice a considerable investment in high-quality training for occupational health service staffs, in the context of which ethical issues must be given a great deal of attention.

Helsinki, 10 June 2002

National Advisory Board on Health Care Ethics

Martti Lindqvist
Chairman

Ritva Halila
General Secretary