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RESOLUTION NO. 99-302
RECOMMENDING THAT AVAILABILITY OF OPIATE SUBSTITUTION
TREATMENT IN KING COUNTY BE INCREASED

WHEREAS, injection drug use is a major cause of HIV, hepatitis and other serious and communicable health consequences; and

WHEREAS, opiates remain the predominant illicit injection drug in King County; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, King County recorded 144 opiate overdose deaths, the largest annual number in its history; and

WHEREAS, our near neighbor, Vancouver, British Columbia, has been experiencing very high rates of HIV infection, with the largest number of new cases coming from the injection drug user population, among whom the HIV infection rate is estimated at 10% to 23%; and

WHEREAS, the illegal use of opiates is a significant driver of criminal activity, particularly property crimes and drug dealing; and

WHEREAS, major scientific and medical authorities such as the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science, the National Institute of Health and the American Society of Addiction Medicine have determined that opiate substitution is the most effective treatment for chronic opiate dependence; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Medical Association, the Washington State Pharmacy Association and the King County Medical Society have endorsed improving access to opiate substitution treatment; and

WHEREAS, such treatment has repeatedly been found, through large scale, rigorous evaluation studies, to reduce illicit opiate use, criminal activity, and improve individuals' employment, family and social functioning; and

WHEREAS, many opiate dependent people in King County are on waiting lists or otherwise unable to receive opiate substitution treatment because of an insufficient number of licensed treatment slots, even though over one half of such clients pay for their own treatment; and

WHEREAS, current limits on licensed capacity restrict the ability to increase access, even when new public funds are available; and

WHEREAS, the number of licensed slots should be based on the need for treatment, determined systematically by public health and chemical dependency authorities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH recommends to the Metropolitan King County Council:

1. That the number of licenses for opiate substitution treatment in King County be increased to better meet the level of need; and
2. That Public Health – Seattle & King County and the Department of Community and Human Services be directed to develop an updated need analysis for opiate substitution treatment; and
3. That the needs analysis consider and evaluate what actions might be effective in encouraging opiate dependent people who are not coming forward to seek treatment on a voluntary basis to seek treatment. The goal will be to develop a media and community outreach plan that will reach this population; and

BE IT RESOLVED FURTHER THAT THE KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

4. Recognizes that opiate substitution treatment includes not just the provision of the substitute, but a range of support and medical services to assist the opiate dependent person to achieve a healthier lifestyle and a reintegration into community life; and
5. Requests Public Health – Seattle & King County to investigate means of incorporating opiate substitution treatment into its primary care clinics and into community health clinics; and
6. Encourages the State Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse to pursue the means of implementing physician-administered opiate substitution treatment in medical practices; and
7. Encourages other local boards of health to support public policy for expanding the availability of opiate substitution treatment throughout Washington, such as recently proposed in SB 5019; and
8. Urges the State Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse to respond to the critical need for additional funding to increase access to opiate substitution treatment.

KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

s/Greg Nickels/s

Adopted May 21, 1999