

Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions

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INTRODUCTION: In Spain, the offer of prevention programmes is very varied and structured, but today the challenge remains how to put evidence into practice. European Commission define a best practice as “a relevant policy or intervention implemented in a real-life setting which has been favourably assessed in terms of adequacy (ethics and evidence) and equity as well as effectiveness and efficiency related to process and outcomes”. The aim of the study was to describe the Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions (the BBPPA portal). **METHODS:** The study design was a descriptive narrative essay on the Spanish BBPPA portal. **RESULTS:** The main results were: 1) design the Spanish BBPPA portal; 2) design a programme evaluation system in the field of drug demand reduction and behavioural addictions; 3) identification,

evaluation and dissemination of programmes as best practices in drug demand reduction and behavioural addictions, 4) dissemination and regular updating of the available evidence; 5) training of professionals aimed at improving the quality of addiction prevention programmes. **CONCLUSIONS:** This project shows the feasibility of working on the quality of prevention programmes, applying the European Drug Prevention Quality Standards adapted to the context of the evaluation of best practices in Spain.

Keywords | Drug Evaluation – Prevention Criteria – Standards – Academic Training

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1 INTRODUCTION

In Europe, confronting the drug phenomenon has become such an urgent need since the early 1990s that despite the recognition that evaluation is important, interventions are often implemented even when there is no evidence of effectiveness that justifies that implementation. In any activity, the objectives and how best to meet them are defined, results are examined, and, if they are not satisfactory, the activity is modified. In the context of health promotion and drug prevention, evaluation is a procedure by which to determine, obtain, analyse, and disseminate information to allow decisions to be made on the basis of scientific facts rather than mere speculation (EMCDDA, 2000).

The European Quality Standards for Drug Prevention (EDPQS; EMCDDA, 2011) describe the necessary steps to be taken when planning, conducting, or evaluating drug prevention programmes. The EDPQS are a tool for self-education and self-reflection with the goal of improving drug prevention efforts. On the other hand, the International Standards (UNODC & WHO, 2018) were designed to pull together the findings of prevention research and identify the key characteristics of evidence-based prevention interventions and policies that have been found to reduce substance use. The aim of the International Standards document is to help decision makers support interventions or policies that have been shown to be effective through rigorous research (UNODC & WHO, 2018). Furthermore, the standards offer an opportunity for opinion and decision makers, prevention researchers, and others who understand the importance of effective prevention to plan effective prevention programming for their society (EMCDDA, 2019).

Nowadays, the design and delivery of effective evidence-based responses to substance use problems is a central focus of European substance use policies. The Evidence Base Practice Institute of the University of Washington (2012) defines “Evidence-Based Practice” as the use of systematic decision-making processes or the provision of services which have been shown, through available scientific evidence, to consistently improve measurable client outcomes. Evidence-based practice relies on data collected through experimental research and accounts for individual client characteristics and clinician expertise (Bergmark et al., 2019); (Shelton et al., 2018).

In the context of the European Union Public Health Best Practice Portal, a best practice is defined as “a relevant policy or intervention implemented in a real life setting which has been favourably assessed in terms of adequacy (ethics and evidence) and equity as well as effectiveness and efficiency related to process and outcomes. Other criteria are important for successful transferability of the practice, such as a clear definition of the context, sustainability, intersectorality and participation of stakeholders” (European Commission Best Practice Portal, 2021). The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) hosts a portal in the areas of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and social reintegration for drug users. The EMCDDA website integrates information ranging from briefings and an evidence database (synthesis of systematic reviews, recommendations) to practice registries of evidence-based programmes (including manuals and imple-

mentation experiences). The evidence-based recommendations highlight what works, but also what does not: “Evidence of ineffectiveness” (Stepien et al., 2022).

In Spain, according to the Evaluation of Spain’s Strategy on Drugs 2009–16 (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2020), the offer of prevention programmes is very varied and structured. Much progress has been made, but today the challenge remains how to put evidence into practice, generalise certification and quality control systems for programmes and services, guarantee greater training, and optimise information and evaluation systems. For this reason, one of the principles on which the National Strategy on Addictions 2017–2024 was developed is scientific evidence. Any action aimed at preventing and reducing the presence of addictions and their associated damage must be empirically proven, have a scientific basis, and be efficient, seeking measurable results that can be evaluated, and thus promote good practices. In addition, quality is also endorsed by scientific evidence, another guiding principle of the Strategy (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2017).

Spain’s National Strategy on Addictions 2017–2024 (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2017) is a document that addresses drugs and behavioural addictions and has been prepared with the participation and consensus of relevant stakeholders, including all the Public Administrations, non-governmental organisations in the sector, scientific societies, research centres, and all the public and private bodies with any involvement in the National Plan on Drugs (NPD). This National Strategy on Addictions 2017–2024, among the transversal action areas on evaluation and quality, establishes the following objective: “Establish and disseminate through the website a catalogue of best practices based on programmes (that addresses drugs and behavioural addictions) recognised by the NPD with the aim of making those programmes the ones primarily implemented by the Public Administrations”. This objective is being achieved through the Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions, which is coordinated between the Government Delegation for the NPD and the Department of Health Promotion and Prevention of the Region of Murcia.

The aim of the study was to describe this project.

2 METHODS

2.1 Design

The main body responsible for the starting of the Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal was the Government Delegation for the NPD. The study design was a descriptive narrative essay of the Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions (the BBPPA portal).

2.2 Setting

Spain, period from 2017 to 2022.

2.3 Data collection and content analysis process

The key elements that make up the structure, processes, and results of the Spanish Project of Best Practice Portal in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions are the following:

- Structure: human and financial resources on which the project is based.
- Processes and results: correspond to the actions established in the Action Plan to carry out the objective of Spain's National Strategy on Addictions 2017–2024: "Establish and disseminate through the web portal a catalogue of programmes recognised as best practices by the NPD, with the aim that these programmes are mainly those implemented by Public Administrations." These actions/processes are: 1) design the Spanish BBPPA portal; 2) design a programme evaluation system in the field of Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions; 3) identification, evaluation, and dissemination of programmes as best practices in Drug Demand Reduction and Behavioural Addictions; 4) dissemination and regular updating of the available evidence; 5) advice and technical support for professionals and/or entities to improve the quality of newly-created or already-implemented programmes; 6) training of professionals aimed at improving the quality of addiction prevention programmes.

3 RESULTS

3.1 PROJECT structure

- **Human resources.** The project has a multidisciplinary working group (psychologists, sociologists, and preventive medicine and public health specialists) as the technical team of the Spanish BBPPA portal coordinated by staff from the Delegation for the NPD of the Ministry of Health and the Department of Health of the Autonomous Community of the Region of Murcia. There is also a working subgroup of experts in addiction prevention programmes for their evaluation.
- **Financial resources.** The project is co-financed by the Government Delegation for the NPD and the Department of Health Promotion and Prevention of the Region of Murcia.

3.2 PROJECT processes and results

Design the Spanish BBPPA portal (www.buenaspracticasadicciones.es)

Once the multidisciplinary working group was constituted, the first task was to design the Best Practice Portal. The portal is subdivided into three areas: Prevention and Risk Reduction, Drug Reduction, and Social Incorporation. Currently, only the first one is being implemented. On the other hand, four sections were designed for the homepage:

Best Practice: This area comprises those programmes implemented in Spain with a rigorous outcome evaluation that have been evaluated by the EMCDDA (Xchange) and Spanish programmes with rigorous designs that follow European approved quality criteria and standards (EDPQS) according to the evaluation undertaken by the experts at the Spanish Portal of Best Practices.

Tools: Under the Prevention and Risk reduction area, the tools are divided into four main sections: (1) Quality Standards, where a selection of international and European standards is collated. These quality standards state the requirements or basic conditions to be accomplished by a project to be considered a benchmark of quality. (2) The Guides and Manuals section collates documents on systematically developed instructions or recommendations to help professionals in decision making. (3) The Protocol section compiles documents with agreed procedures for specific problems addressed to the clinical/health-care setting. Finally, (4) the Instruments of Evaluation section collects tools (questionnaires, scales, etc.) to facilitate tasks such as assessment, identification, and measurement for the evaluation of interventions.

Evidence: This section gives access to the latest evidence on addiction-related interventions. The information is based on systematic searches and it is updated regularly.

Training

- Training for organisations and administrations to enhance the quality of programmes:** This section comprises the formative strategy “La calidad de los programas de prevención de adicciones: planificación, estándares europeos y evaluación” (The quality of addiction prevention programmes; planning, European standards, and evaluation). Since 2020, the action of the PBBPP has been extended by offering training and advice for programme developers and implementers to improve the quality of their programmes. Up until now, four training events have been held for practitioners and implementers in local administrations and a social entity in addiction prevention. Likewise, several advisory actions have been carried out to improve the quality of the programmes presented, aimed at the promoters of these programmes.

These are the five modules of the training activity:

Module 1: Best practice in addiction prevention

Module 2: Quality standards for drug addiction prevention

Module 3: Process evaluation

Module 4: The results and impact evaluations of addiction prevention programmes and projects

Module 5: The European Prevention Curriculum

This training strategy is a key element of the project since it facilitates continuous training for programme developers and implementers.

- Training for evaluators:** It is an internal process based on a training strategy for evaluators of prevention programmes in the evaluation criteria of the Spanish BBPPA portal.

To be a member of the evaluation team, it is necessary to attach a curriculum vitae and fill out an application form that includes information that is relevant to the applicant’s suitability for performing the function of an evaluator within the Portal. This information is used to assign each evaluator to different programmes that are sent to the portal to be evaluated. The last step to becoming part of the evaluation team is to complete this training.

This training is compulsory for everyone who is going to be part of the evaluation team and it is focused on three main content elements:

- to know about the Spanish BBPPA and its structure and operation
- to understand the evaluation procedure of best practices and the evaluation tools to be used
- to know the evaluation scale based on the EDPQS and its application for the evaluation of programmes

So far, three training events have been held for evaluation programme experts.

Evaluation criteria and scoring system according to the EDPQS

The 15 evaluation criteria and their respective items are based on the EDPQS (available at: <http://www.buenaspracticasadicciones.es>), and are grouped into the following sections:

- cross-cutting elements that integrate participation, ethics, and gender criteria;
- the design of the programme, where a description of the problem, the theoretical framework, target population, and objectives of the programme are evaluated;
- the implementation section includes the criteria used to evaluate the content of the programme, resources, training, and dissemination;
- the results section, which evaluates the process and its results and includes a cost-effectiveness evaluation.

Scoring system for programme evaluation: each criterion is quantified on the basis of the scores for its items, which are only valid if evidence documents are provided. The final score is calculated proportionally between the four sections, with a range between 0 and 10.

Recognition of the Spanish BBPPA process by external evaluation

It is focused on the evaluation of the quality of national addiction prevention programmes, according to the EDPQS and the Quality Plan of the National Health System model (institutional recognition as best practice after a voluntary external evaluation process).

The evaluation process begins once the creators of the programme have registered in the Portal and have completed the short evaluation form. Once they receive the approval of the technical team of the Portal to continue with the process, they must give full information on the programme through the application form.

The technical team is in charge of making a first review of the programmes. A programme can be admitted for evaluation within the Portal, it can be rejected for not meeting the necessary requirements, or it can be proposed for presentation in the Xchange registry. In this last case, it is necessary that the programme has carried out evaluations with a robust design.

Once all the information is completed, the technical team assigns the programme to two evaluators, who will remain anonymous to the creators of the programme throughout the process. If more information or clarification of any section is required, the portal’s Technical Team will contact the team and/or creators of the programme and once received, it will be sent to the evaluators.

The external evaluation process follows these steps:

Step 1: Individual evaluation. The evaluators make a first individual assessment according to the criteria in the EDPQS, which are specified in the application of the evaluation template used in the Portal.

Step 2: Consensus meeting and final evaluation report. Once the programme has been assessed individually by each evaluator, a consensus meeting is held. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the evaluation scores, strengths, and areas for improvement of the programme being evaluated. Finally, they write the evaluation report and the evaluation team submit it to the team that created the programme for review.

Step 3: Final amendment of the report. This opens a period in which the creators of the programme can provide more evidence, which is analysed by the evaluators who finally prepare the rectification evaluation report. This final report is sent to the NPD by the technical team for approval. If creators does not see the need to carry out a review of the evaluation, the evaluation report will be considered final. In the event that the evaluation receives seven points or more, the programme will be published on the portal and the programme will be recognised as Best Practice by the NPD, for a period of three years, after which a review will be carried out.

Step 4: Publication form. The evaluators complete the publication form and the programme is published in the database of the Portal.

4 DISCUSSION

The EDPQS standards (Brotherhood & Sumnall, 2011) draw attention to understanding “how people, programmes/interventions, organisations, and (governmental) strategies contribute towards drug prevention and to think about how existing efforts can be improved in order to obtain better and more sustainable results”. Once the standards have been widely recognised, used, and accepted, some countries would probably be ready and willing to begin testing the feasibility of national (or supra-national) certification/accreditation systems based on some well-consented standards (Burkhart, 2015).

In Spain, the Law on Quality and Cohesion of the National Health System establishes the reference framework and the principles that govern best practices in the National Health System (BOE, 2003). It establishes that the improvement of the quality of the health system as a whole must shape the actions of public and private health institutions. And the elements that make up the so-called quality infrastructure are specified,

which include quality and safety standards, indicators, clinical practice guidelines, and records of best practices and adverse events. Article 59 of this chapter establishes the need to create a register of best practice, which will collect information on those practices that offer an innovation or a way of providing a better service than the current one. This legal requirement is established in the Quality Plan for the National Health System of Spain (Spanish Ministry of Health and Social Policy, 2010) as an equity strategy: “Promote health policies based on best practices”. In this context, a methodology for external evaluation and recognition of best practice in the National Health System was developed (Ministerio de Sanidad, 2013).

This project, focused on the prevention of addictions, has taken as its reference the common procedure for the identification, collection, and dissemination of best practice in the Spanish National Health System and the EDPQS, to evaluate and recognise an addiction prevention program as best practice. It is a sustainable and transferable project because it has the support of political decision makers at the national and regional level.

A key element for the success of this project is to promote the evaluation of the effectiveness and the scientific evidence of the programmes among prevention professionals and political decision makers. Now, in Spain, this promotion is carried out through the BBPPA portal. The creators of programmes and political decision makers should see it as an opportunity to improve health outcomes and investment in health.

This project shows the feasibility of working on the quality of prevention programmes by applying the EDPQS. This is a real-life framework of how to approach good practices in Spain and even in the European context. There are not many national registries yet, especially not so complete as Spanish one.

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