

# SECTION 1: Introduction

Mr Andreas Plüddemann

This report contains detailed data from specialist substance abuse treatment centres in the five sites that comprise the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, namely, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Gauteng province and Mpumalanga province. Summaries or abstracts of other presentations given at the various report back meetings are also provided.

Cannabis and the cannabis/Mandrax combination are still the most common illicit drugs used, especially among youth attending specialist treatment centres. Young people under the age of 20 now comprise almost a quarter of the treatment centre client population across all sites, with only Mpumalanga having less than 20% of all patients under the age of 20 years.

It appears that treatment demand for cocaine/crack may be stabilizing in most sites, although Cape Town had a slight increase in the proportion of patients with cocaine/crack as their primary substance of abuse during the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2003 and many clients continue to report cocaine or crack as a secondary drug of abuse.

The proportion of patients seeking treatment for heroin abuse seems relatively stable in Cape Town and Gauteng. Of concern is the apparent increase in the proportion of patients reporting injecting in Gauteng.

Club drugs and prescription or over-the-counter medicines are still more common as secondary substances. Treatment centres in Cape Town experienced an increase in the number of patients reporting methamphetamine (Speed/‘Ice’) as their primary drug of abuse. Anecdotal reports of the increasing availability of methcathinone (CAT) in Cape Town and Gauteng also continue.

The relationship between the use of alcohol and sexual risk behaviour was again highlighted in two presentations, pointing to the need to further investigate excessive or ‘risky’ alcohol consumption as an exacerbating factor in the country’s HIV/AIDS pandemic.

I hope you will find this report of value to you in your work. If you have any specific feedback on the report please send your comments to Susan Hon at [susan.hon@mrc.ac.za](mailto:susan.hon@mrc.ac.za) or fax her at 021-938-0342.

It remains for me to thank Susan Hon for her effort in compiling this report, the various members of the network who have provided data, presentations or comments, and the Gauteng Department of Social Services and Population Development and the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Directorate of the National Department of Health for their ongoing financial support to this project. Their support has among other things been used to collect treatment information on over 10 000 treatment episodes annually, to facilitate hosting regional meetings attended by approximately 200 persons every six months, and the preparation and mailing of reports that are sent bi-annually to over 400 persons.

