

CAST TREATMENT

Feb 27 24 Hrs P 5

New trial 'a bargain': Mayor

If a new clinical trial goes ahead as planned in Vancouver, crystal-meth and crack-cocaine addicts will soon be able to legally access maintenance drugs.

"Providing [addicts] with a medication that can help with the symptoms and linking them with health-care professionals is a really good step," said Phoenix Beck, who at age 15, was a crystal meth junkie.

She made a conscious decision to change her life – but still had to go through her street dealer to get Adderall, a prescription drug typically used to treat ADHD, to quell her withdrawal symptoms.

Clinical trial services for Chronic Addiction Substitution Treatment (CAST) targets chronic offenders and survival sex-trade workers.

Similar research on stimulant maintenance drugs have been done in the UK, but "we



- Rob Kruyt, 24 hours

Phoenix Beck rose up and away from active addiction with the help of a harm reduction drug. She now supports the CAST trials initiative.

haven't done any of that science in Canada," said David Holtzman, who sits on the board of directors for Inner Change, the non-profit society funding a managing the program.

The exact cost hasn't been determined, but "when you add up the number of dollars spent on policing, on hospital services, and on the justice system, this will be a bargain," said Vancouver mayor Sam Sullivan, who is looking to the private sector and the provincial and federal governments for funding.

The three-year clinical trial could be up and running as early as next fall, but still needs approval from Health Canada.

Until then, addicts looking to overcome their addictions will have to get legal medications in illegal ways, a thought that doesn't sit well with Beck, who credits her successful recovery to short-term maintenance drugs.

"My firm belief is when someone has the will to change, there shouldn't be any barriers in their way," said Beck.

- Robyn Stubbs, 24 hours