

# The Peninsula

Local Focus, Global Vision

## Italy to help rehabilitate drug addicts

BY AZMAT HAROON

**DOHA:** The Supreme Council of Health (SCH) is collaborating with Italy's San Patrignano Community and Uninettuno University for programmes on substance abuse in the country.

The establishment of a new addiction treatment centre and some of its facilities were announced yesterday during the official visit of two Italian delegations to Doha, which was led by Letizia Moratti, former Italian Minister of Education.

"The visit comes with a project of a mutual cooperation to provide and ensure the best medical

services for the victims of drug addiction and to benefit from the unique experience of the San Patrignano Community," Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani, Director of Public Health Department at SCH, said.

The SCH and San Patrignano Community, which boasts a 72 percent success rate for addicts, will collaborate on education, prevention and rehabilitation programmes for addicts. Online Master's courses in psycho-social rehabilitation will be set up for practitioners in the field of addiction in collaboration with the Uninettuno University.

"The successful results obtained

by the therapeutic model of the community, which are recognised at the European level, can be developed in Qatar, where drug emergence is now increasing. Only through an international cooperation at this level, we will be able to join forces on prevention, fight and recovery from drug addiction worldwide," Moratti said.

Although comprehensive statistics on drug addiction in Qatar are not available, officials estimate that the magnitude of the problem is 'similar to other countries in the region'.

"We are aware of the need for the rehabilitation facility here," Dr Mounir Soussi, Medical

Director of the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center (TRC), said, adding that adults here were primarily affected by alcohol abuse while many youngsters were addicted to amphetamines and cannabis.

Addicts seeking help in Qatar included youth as young as 18 to adults over 60 years of age.

Many addicts are treated at Hamad Medical Corporation's (HMC) Psychiatry Department, Arshidni Centre as well as the Social Rehabilitation Centre (SRC). Drug addiction treatment is based on a biological, psycho-social and spiritual programme, with a 40-day residential programme. This includes 10 days for detoxification and 30 days in psycho-social therapy, after which patients are sent to the after-care programme.

"It is a real problem. We have a temporary centre now which has the capacity of some 20 beds. Once construction of the new rehabilitation completes, we will have 250 beds," Dr Soussi said.

There are also plans to establish a separate centre for women in the new facility, which is meant to be for Qataris only. The centre, however, would have to take in addicts from expatriates communities in the future, according to Dr Soussi.

He said that many addicts in the country go through relapse because of the stigma attached with the problem. A large majority of families in Qatar do not accept addicts back in their homes even after they complete rehab.

"They cannot go back to their families, school, university, or



The Director of Public Health Department at the Supreme Council of Health, Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani, with Italian delegates and other officials at the press conference at the SCH headquarters yesterday. (Below) FROM LEFT: Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Hamad Al Thani with Italian officials Letizia Moratti, Monica Borzanti, Antonio Boschim, and Alessandro Caforo.

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work places. Here, the society still believes that addiction is not a disease. Addiction for them is something that is forbidden by religion and because of that they think addicts cannot be forgiven," Dr Soussi said.

This is one reason why local patients prefer treatment abroad in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon or Europe.

Moratti also said that the Italian delegation was

collaborating with Qatar to form a joint committee to assess cases of substance abuse in GCC countries and existing rehabilitation facilities for them.

"We are ready to establish a joint-committee to discuss scien-

tific research, legal national and international policies on rehabilitation and prevention," Moratti, who is also an ambassador of San Patrignano Community, said.

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