

How to wage war on drugs

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THE escalating abuse of drugs and other psychoactive substances has become a major global concern necessitating a comprehensive response and a collaborative and participatory partnership among all segments of society.

Business and community collaboration is at the heart of such an approach.

The individual workplace mirrors these problems as a result of the deteriorating health of workers, absenteeism, work accidents and other increased safety risks.

Today, substance abuse in the workplace is costing businesses billions of ringgit annually in lost productivity and healthcare costs.

Drug addiction is no longer a rich nation's problem or a poor man's affliction.

It transcends national, ethnic, religious, class and gender lines. Addicts range from the rich to the poor, the homeless to blue and white-collar workers, students, rural farmers, urban employees and street children.

In addition to wreaking havoc on the lives of addicts and their families, drug addiction is creating a myriad of new problems for communities. They included increased crime and violence, the emergence of various social ills and the deterioration of the social fabric, as well as the spread of drug-related diseases like AIDS and hepatitis.

The effect is felt in workplaces, too. Many work-related accidents, injuries, illness, absenteeism, non-productivity and poor quality of production are linked to drug abuse.

The need to ensure that workplaces are free from drug abuse is obvious. Drug use has been found to contribute to workplace accidents, absenteeism, medical claims and compensation claims.

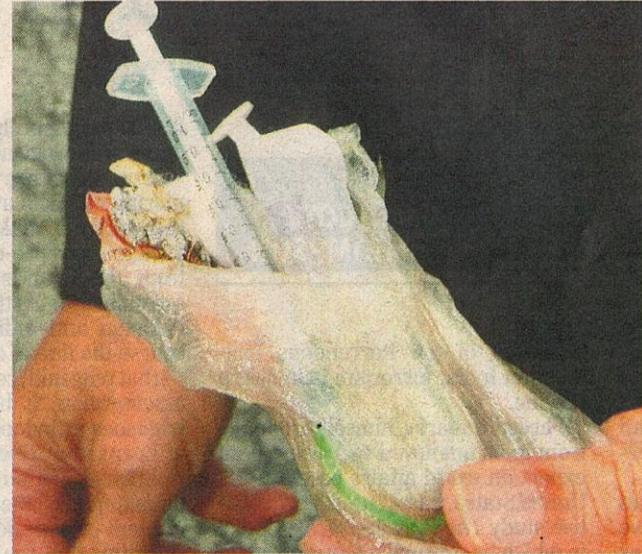
Collaborative efforts among the government, the private sector and non-governmental organisations are needed to overcome drug abuse at the workplace and keep the workforce productive and healthy for economic development and

an improved quality of life.

All companies should have a health and safety policy and every effort should be made to ensure workplace drug-abuse prevention programmes are made an integral part of activities.

I believe the best way to address the drug abuse problem at the workplace is through the implementation of the following six-point programme:

- Management commitment and leadership to work towards a drug-free workplace.
- Drug-free workplace policy and committee to operationalise the activities of a drug-free workplace programme.
- Employee education and awareness programme on the specific dangers of drug abuse and why the workforce should be free from drugs.
- Drug-screening programme to detect drug abuse at the workplace.
- Treatment referral to enable employers to assist employees who are drug-users to seek help, counselling, treat-



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ment and rehabilitation instead of dismissing them and making them a threat to the community.

- Corporate-sector involvement to provide sponsorship to help credible NGOs to carry

out sustained anti-drug campaigns at the community level.

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