

NARCONON 'Bad

news': Experts

'Amateur notions of biology'

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If you have a drug problem, Narconon isn't the answer, some experts say.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's bad news, and I would not advise anyone to go near it," says UCLA psychiatry professor Dr. Louis West, who has studied the church since 1950, when it was L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics, and not a recognized religion.

"If someone needs help, they (Narconon) are taking the time and money away from a program that could actually help them," West said yesterday.

Narconon is oriented to lead clients to "the bridge — which is the bridge between the Narconon front and the Scientology octopus," he said.

"Once on the bridge, they become audited, which is a one-way street to getting into the church."

And once involved in Scientology, they're persuaded to pay for seemingly endless treatments, he said.

Claims that Narconon's programs are 75 to 95 per cent successful are questionable at best, he said, adding he knows of no scientific basis for Narconon studies of its success rate.

Its regimen of programmed exercise, vitamin treatments, and saunas to sweat out toxins is more useful as a "ceremony" than a treatment, he said.

"Their theories about how toxins are sweated out are based on Mr. Hubbard's amateur notions of biology. The risk of dehydration and the complications thereof far outweigh any real benefits."

Local drug expert Dr. Bill Jacyk also has doubts about Narconon's scientific claims.

"Their science is not valid," said Jacyk, a doctor for 25 years and an addiction specialist for 12 years.

The idea of "detoxifying" people isn't new, but trying to enhance the process is next to impossible, and can be dangerous, he said.

"I've heard of natives using sweat

lodges to detoxify, but for people whose systems are already stressed by drug use, it could be harmful."

Taking vitamins is often recommended to drug users suffering from deficiencies, but the huge amounts Narconon advocates are beyond what's needed or helpful, and may be dangerous to some people, he said.

His greatest concern with the program is that people may feel euphoric and drug-free when leaving, but later may return to their former ways.

"I'd like to see if those people are using again after three years," he said.

A Vancouver substance abuse counsellor said the Narconon program there has been "basically black-listed" by people in the field.

"We stay as far away from them as we can. We would never recommend the program to any of the people we deal with," said

Tim Axsem, an executive director with Odyssey Substance Abuse Services for Youth.

Two teenagers he counselled went through an initial interview at Narconon, but rejected the program because of its "hard-sell, high-pressure tactics," he said.

"They felt the people were in their face the whole time, and the real issue was getting them in the program — not their drug use."

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