

Translation Oct 2/07 by Carmen E. Albizu-García of article published in “El Nuevo Día”, San Juan, PR Oct 1/07 by José A. Sánchez Fournier

Background info on Pereira: Miguel Pereira is an attorney, ex-prosecutor, who was Superintendent of Police in PR and is currently the Secretary of PR’s Department of Correction and Rehabilitation. Under his leadership, services for substance use disorders and other mental health problems for the inmate population in the PR prison system are gradually being transformed to provide interventions that are evidence based. He has funded expansion of MMT from 40 to 300 slots, is supporting adding medication treatment with Buprenorphine-naloxone to the array of prison services after a successful pilot study evaluating the feasibility of providing this medication to near-release inmates with opiate-dependence, and has also recently expanded psychological services for the institutionalized population. This article was published in “El Nuevo Día”, the daily newspaper with the widest circulation in PR, which can be accessed in www.endi.com

ARTICLE: Pereira “prescribes” medicating drug addicts

Secretary insists on changing strategy in order to reduce crime

According to Miguel Pereira, “Puerto Rico can not legalize drugs because the United States rejects that alternative, but it can medicalize, because if not, drugs will consume us”.

In spite of being known as a hard-liner correctional administrator, Miguel Pereira is one of the most ferocious defenders of medicalizing drugs as a strategy to reduce crime and other social ailments that are brought about by the system relying on punishing users of controlled substances.

“Drug traffic is the principal source of corruption in Puerto Rico and the United States and in all countries pursuing punitive sentences for using drugs.” Pereira manifested.

“The profits generated by drug trafficking throughout all levels of distribution are so obscene, that they can access anything. We have seen drug traffickers accessing legislators in Puerto Rico, police officers, and physicians. They can reach anyone in our society, because they have so much money to offer, that they will find someone morally flawed willing to commit themselves.” added the Secretary.

The solution, according to Secretary Pereira, lies in a new approach to the problem of drug addiction in the island. "Puerto Rico can not legalize drugs, because United States has rejected it, but it can medicalize, because otherwise we will be consumed by drugs." declared Pereira.

Puerto Rico, explained the Secretary, is the only penal jurisdiction within the United States that offers Methadone programs for inmates.

"I did not easily arrive at these conclusions. I believe in discipline and responsibility. But we must accept our reality." he pointed out.

"Eighty percent of crimes committed in Puerto Rico are associated with drug trafficking, we are told by Dr. Dora Nevaes" he added, quoting the known criminologist.

In his opinion, "What burdens us is continuing to search for a moral flaw in the drug user. We continue to establish erroneous strategies."

"It is not unrealistic (option), we have to medicate drugs. If we don't, we are handing our future to the drug traffickers. There will always be someone willing to make a profit from their brother's weakness" he ended saying.

Original Spanish version:

Titular insiste en cambiar de estrategia con el propósito de bajar la criminalidad.

Por José A. Sánchez Fournier / Especial El Nuevo Día

Según Miguel Pereira, "Puerto Rico no puede legalizar la droga, porque Estados Unidos ya lo rechazó, pero puede medicalizarla, porque sino, la droga nos va a consumir".

A pesar de que se ha destacado por ser un administrador correccional de línea dura, Miguel Pereira es uno de los más fieros defensores de la medicalización de la droga como estrategia para disminuir la criminalidad y los demás males sociales que trae consigo el sistema de castigo disciplinario contra los usuarios de sustancias controladas.

"El trasiego de drogas es la fuente principal de la corrupción en Puerto Rico, en los Estados Unidos, y en todos los países que persiguen una pena punitiva a la utilización de drogas", manifestó Pereira.

"Las ganancias que deja el trasiego de drogas en todos niveles de distribución son tan obscenas, que le dan acceso a cualquier cosa. Hemos visto narcotraficantes accediendo a legisladores de Puerto Rico, a policías, a médicos. Llegan a cualquier persona en nuestra sociedad, porque tienen tanto dinero que ofrecer, que van a encontrar alguien con la falta de moralidad para comprometerse", agregó el Titular.

La solución, según Pereira, es un nuevo enfoque al problema de drogadicción en la Isla. "Puerto Rico no puede legalizar la droga, porque Estados Unidos ya lo rechazó, Pero puede medicalizarla, porque sino, la droga nos va a consumir", sentenció Pereira.

Puerto Rico, explicó el Secretario, es la única jurisdicción penal dentro de los Estados Unidos que ofrece programas de metadona para los confinados.

"Yo no llego a estas conclusiones fácilmente. Yo creo en la disciplina y la responsabilidad. Pero debemos aceptar nuestra realidad", señaló.

"El ochenta por ciento de los crímenes en Puerto Rico están asociados con el trasiego de drogas, dice la doctora Dora Nevares", añadió, citando a la reconocida criminóloga.

"Lo que nos aqueja es que seguimos buscando una falta moral en el usuario de drogas. Seguimos estableciendo estrategias erradas", opinó.

"No es (una opción) irreal, nosotros tenemos que medicar la droga. Si no lo hacemos, le estamos entregando nuestro futuro a los narcotraficantes. Siempre va a haber alguien dispuesto a lucrarse de la debilidad de sus hermanos", terminó diciendo.