



Slavko Sakoman, MD – Croatia
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While he is a prominent Croatian psychiatrist and neurologist specializing in addiction treatment for over 35 years, Dr. Slavko Sakoman’s extensive career has significantly contributed to substance use treatment programs in Croatia and other European countries. Dr. Sakoman played a decisive role in introducing methadone as a treatment for heroin dependent persons, taking a public health approach that was instrumental in shaping Croatia's response to the epidemic. When presenting the plan to the Croatian Parliament, Dr. Sakoman included the use of methadone despite strong political opposition. His well-defined proposal faced resistance, but he successfully argued for its inclusion and emphasized that substance users should be treated humanely and with empathy. Then, through the United States Information Agency International Visitor Program, all the countries of the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) used the professional assistance of Dr. Sakoman to implement the Croatian model of treating opioid use disorder with opiate agonists, mainly methadone.

Expanding patients’ options for treatment, Dr. Sakoman has advocated for opioid treatment specialists to be consultants to family doctors in order for opioid dependent persons to be treated like any other patient, without judgment or moralization. He organized and participated in the use of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) in Croatian prisons and developed programs to add the use of buprenorphine for MAT, improving access to treatment and preventing an HIV epidemic in Croatia. Serving as a permanent correspondent for the Pompidou Group Council of Europe, Dr. Sakoman’s tireless efforts have saved countless lives in Croatia and other European countries who have employed his strategy for an efficient system for treating opioid use disorder.