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The Times

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Therapy and drugs to stop paedophiles committing sex offences

FROM ROGER BOYES IN BERLIN

SEX therapists, using a combination of films, counselling and drugs, will next week begin the world's biggest programme aimed at preventing passive paedophiles from turning into active child molesters.

The Berlin Charité Hospital has selected 180 men from almost 300 candidates — from Germany, Austria and Switzerland — for the one-year therapy.

Some applied after seeing a television advertisement depicting a scene on an underground train. An attractive young mother enters a carriage with her blond 10-year-old son and smiles at a male passenger. The man's heart starts to beat rapidly — but because of the boy, rather than the woman. "Do you love children more than you should?" asks the commentary, and refers to a website. Dr Christoph Joseph Ahlers, the co-ordinator of the project, said that until now therapy has been administered only to paedophiles who have been caught and convicted of molesting a child. Now, the teaching hospital will apply similar treatment to those who fear that they are in danger of committing an offence.

"We have had candidates from across the whole spectrum — from the unemployed to people in very socially prominent positions," Dr Ahlers said.

Recent high-profile cases of suspected molestation — such as the arrest in Vietnam of Gary Glitter — have made paedophilia a public issue.

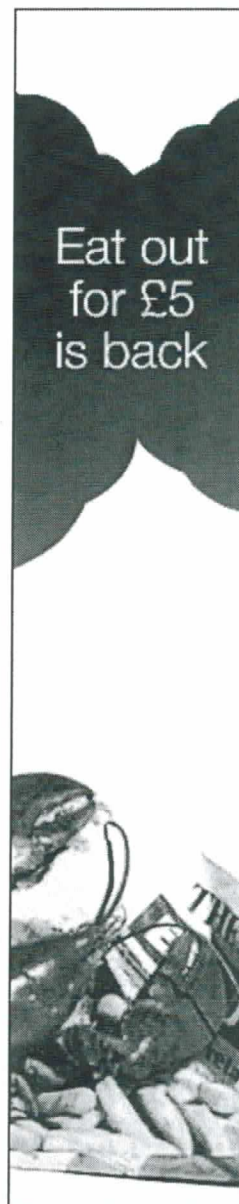
The Charité candidates were chosen after answering questions about their sexual fantasies for more than 90 minutes and completing questionnaires. They are guaranteed anonymity and the treatment is free.

The therapy will either be individual or in groups of up to 12. Initially the patients will be asked questions such as: "Why do you always choose to go past the school when you go shopping?"

"Our starting point for paedophile patients is to tell them you can't help what you are — but you are responsible for what you do," Dr Ahlers said.

The patients will be talked through various situations, illustrated by role-play, still pictures or films. They can also choose to be injected with Cyproteronacetat, which impedes testosterone, the sexual hormone. This is applied to convicted molesters but the volunteers are free to opt out. "Paedophilia is not curable," Dr Ahlers said. "Sufferers must learn to live with their inclination."

The therapy should free patients from guilt about their fantasies, and also teach them how to restrain their behaviour. Most child assaults occur within families or close to home, according to a study by the American Psychiatric Association. The project to



help latent paedophiles is provoking controversy, even before it has officially begun.

White Ring, the German association set up to protect sexually-threatened children, has refused to back the scheme financially. The main government research foundation has also decided not to support such a politically sensitive programme.

Private television channels have been showing the advertisement but some state broadcasters have declined. Funding is coming primarily from the Volkswagen Foundation.

Dr Klaus Beier, who has been working on the therapy programme, said: "Our study wants to show that there are many men who are aware that they could become a danger to children. These men want help, and in the interest of protecting children we should offer it to them."

There are around 20,000 cases of child molestation reported each year in Germany, but police believe the real number could be 20 times larger. The social aim, according to both Dr Beier and Dr Ahlers, is to ensure that paedophile counselling becomes as widespread and as socially acceptable as Aids advice centres.

CHILDREN IN PERIL

- 20,000 cases of child molestation reported in Germany every year
- German police say the real number of cases is 400,000 annually
- One per cent of men are said to have paedophile tendencies
- 95 per cent of all paedophiles are men
- The age of consent is 14 in Germany

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