Providing Clean Syringes to Injection Drug Users: A Look at 3rd Year Pharmacy Students’ Knowledge & Beliefs on Individual & Structural Factors Affecting Their Decision to Sell Syringes

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OVERVIEW

- Background
- Project Methods
- Findings
- Discussion
- Future Direction
- Acknowledgements
Background– Injection Drug Use

- Estimated 1.85 million injection drug users (IDUs) in the US & 4,000–21,000 in Wisconsin
- Between 920 million– 1.68 billion injections by IDUs per year
- Blood–borne infections:
  - 16% of IDUs infected with HIV, 33% of AIDS cases attributed to ID use
  - 40–80% of IDUs infected with hepatitis B
  - 65–95% of IDUs infected with hepatitis C
Advocacy for IDUs: Harm Reduction Coalition started in 1993 with the aim of meeting IDUs “where they’re at.”

Current interventions: Syringe exchange programs (SEPs), opioid overdose prevention, methadone maintenance treatment, safe injection facilities, heroin-assisted treatment

Community concerns: increase in injection drug use (ID use), recruitment of new IDUs at a younger age, increase in crime, increase in number of syringes discarded→ none have come to pass
Needle Exchange programs save lives. Research has proven that they help stop the spread of HIV and do not increase drug use.

Sharing needles is the number one cause of HIV in New York City. If you shoot drugs - please do not share needles.

Call us to find out how you can trade in your used needles for new ones and get help with HIV testing, medical care, and drug treatment.

800-745-6495
This service is FREE.

www.positivehealthproject.org
Background – Pharmacist’s role

- SEPs have had an undeniable impact in reducing HIV rates among IDUs, but unfortunately are not found everywhere
- Pharmacies offer an available & accessible alternative to buy clean syringes
- Pharmacists’ attitudes towards selling syringes
- What do pharmacy students think about selling syringes to IDUs?
Project Methods

- *Elicitation Interviews* – to identify relevant outcomes, facilitators & barriers to behavior
- *Development of survey* – based on integrated behavioral model (IBM), Likert scale & open-ended questions
  
  ex. “How certain are you that you can sell syringes without the support of your peers?”
  “Do you believe that pharmacists’ have a role in addressing this problem? Why or why not?”
Project Methods cont...

- *Cognitive Interviews* – to evaluate sources of response error in the survey
- *Administration of survey* – 3rd year pharmacy students
Findings

Themes:

- **Importance of peer/social norms**
  “As a young pharmacist you have to establish yourself as a credible pharmacist and selling syringes might hinder that…”

- **Lack of exposure within curriculum** – ethics, law, substance abuse elective
  “We talk about different infections and risk factors associated with those infections, but we never talk about what we can directly do to prevent infections.”
Findings cont...

Contrasting views of selling syringes as enabling ID use vs. helping decrease disease burden

“If you give them (IDUs) syringes, you enable them to use because you are taking the fear away.”

Stigma surrounding ID use & IDUs

“Education of the lay public is also important. I can just see the newspaper headline now: Local Pharmacy Supports Heroin Use!”

Corporate/chain policies seen as a major barrier to selling syringes
Discussion

- Barriers identified include structural, social, & individual factors
- For many, ID use and associated health consequences have never been framed as a public health problem
- Consequences of lack of exposure to a topic that many pharmacists will encounter in their careers
- Solutions proposed by pharmacy students
Multi-dimensional approach required to address this public health burden

Current interventions have been successful in decreasing the disease burden but are not widespread in their accessibility & availability

Pharmacists and pharmacy students are an under-utilized resource and need to be included in the dialogue along with other health professionals

Curriculum in pharmacy schools should include discussion on the public health burden of injection drug use
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