Birth and Evolution of a Prison Based Inmate Peer Education Program: the California Medical Facility Experience

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CMF Peer Education Program Created in Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

- Established in late 1980s at CMF, a medical referral prison facility within the California Department of Corrections
- Original mission was to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic among prisoners
- Initially focused entirely on HIV education (diagnosis, treatment, prevention, advocacy)
Evolution To A More Comprehensive Health Education Program

• Inmate Peer Education Workers work closely with other peer programs such as the Pastoral Care Service workers and the Men’s Advisory Committee

• Over time, mission and vision changed to include other sexually transmitted infections and, eventually, a wide range of health education topics
Multiple Methods of Reaching the Prisoner Population

- 1:1 counseling
- Group educational sessions
- Written materials
- Health Education library
- In-house video system
- Facility wide events (World AIDS Day, annual Health Education Fair)
World AIDS Day Event, CMF
Health Education Fair, CMF
Health Education Fair, CMF
Prisoner Peer Education Programs: Opportunities and Benefits

• Clustering of individuals with many health care needs
• Teachable moment
• Constitutional right to health care
• Oftentimes, court mandated resources
Prisoner Peer Education Programs: Opportunities and Benefits

• Encouraging other inmates to be tested for treatable conditions
• Education about the disease and treatment options
• Encouraging treatment to prevent complications
• Harm reduction education to limit transmission
Prisoner Peer Education Programs: Opportunities and Benefits

- Meaningful activities/employment for inmates
- Empowerment
- Trust building with inmate population
- Improved communication between administration and inmates
- Job skills
- Positive media attention
Prisoner Peer Education Programs: Challenges
Challenges

• Space
• Security
• Selection Process for inmate educators
  – Paid vs volunteer, custodial screening, selecting qualified candidates
• Funding
  – Staff
  – Supplies, copy machines, computers, teaching materials
Challenges: the Custody-Medical Interface