To Dream the Impossible Dream: Syringe Access Programs in U.S. Jails and Prisons

ANDREW REYNOLDS
HEPATITIS C EDUCATION MANAGER
PROJECT INFORM
Overview of the Discussion

We will set up syringe exchange programs for all U.S. jails and prisons in the next 45 minutes...
But seriously:

- Brief overview of prison-based syringe access programs;
- A discussion of what’s possible in the United States;
- Forming a workgroup for on-going discussion.
A Brief History of Syringe Exchange in Prisons

- First program was initiated in 1992, in Hindelbank Prison, a women's prison in Switzerland;

- Started as an underground move by a physician and became funded as a project in 1994;

- Drug use is still illegal, and an inmate caught with them will face discipline;

- 6 syringe dispensing machines; one-for-one exchange (can now have as many as 5).
A glimpse of Hindelbank Prison
The Global Experience of Syringe Exchange in Prisons

- There are approximately 69 prisons with SEPs, spread across 13 countries:

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- Note: Some of these were just pilot programs and may or may not be ongoing. It’s hard to have accurate, up-to-date numbers.
Prison Syringe Exchange: Models of Distribution – machines

Anonymous Syringe Dispensing Machines

Lichtenberg Prison Berlin
Saxerriet Prison Switzerland
Prison Syringe Exchange:
Models of Distribution – hand-to-hand

Harm Reduction Kit
Soto de Real Prison, Madrid
Lessons Learned

- Reductions in syringe sharing; in some cases, no syringe sharing;
- No HIV seroconversions (HCV possibly, but hard to discern);
- Reduction in other injection-related complications such as abscesses;
- No increase in drug use; in some cases reductions in drug use;
- Cheap to implement and cost-effective to maintain.
Fears allayed...

- Improved access to syringes...
  - Did not increase drug use or drug injection;
  - Did not increase in violence, including use of a syringe as a weapon;
  - Did not increase in occupational health and safety risks for prison staff (in fact, likely a decrease).
Concluding Thoughts

- Are we ready to put syringe exchange programs in jails and prisons in the United States?

- U.S. jails and prisons are wholly different when compared to other institutions around the world

- Behavior change takes time...changing institutions like jails and prisons will likely take a long, long time.

- Harm reduction works outside of prison walls...there is no reason they shouldn't work inside of them.