NEEDLE & SYRINGE PROGRAMME

Your health challenge

- In 2016/17, around 1 in 12 (8.5%) of adults aged 16 to 59 in England and Wales had taken an illicit drug in the last year\(^1\)
- There has been a 40% increase in hospital admissions due to poisoning by illegal drugs since 2006/07\(^1\)
- Almost 642,200 people aged between 16-59 in England and Wales used anabolic steroids in 2016\(^2\)

Fact: Deaths related to drug misuse are at their highest level since comparable records began in 1993\(^1\)

How can community pharmacies help?

Pharmacists and their teams can provide a needle and syringe programme which ensures that clients have the opportunity to exchange used needles for new ones and receive safer injection information.

This helps reduce the transmission of blood-borne viruses and other infections caused by sharing injecting equipment, including HIV, hepatitis B and C.

Many pharmacy services also provide needles for those who inject performance and image enhancing drugs, such as anabolic steroids and growth hormones.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has issued guidance\(^3\) on needle and syringe programmes and recommends that commissioners use pharmacies, especially those with longer opening hours, to provide this service to help ensure geographical and demographic coverage.

The guidance also recognises the potential for using pharmacies to provide young people with this service especially as they can also encourage young people to make contact with specialist services.

What the experts say

“Warrington LA has stated in its Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment a desire to extend the range of pharmacies that currently provide the needle and syringe programme which demonstrates that there is an identified need for the service and it delivers tangible benefits.”

Helen Murphy, previous CEO, Cheshire & Wirral LPC

“Needle exchange is an important element of maintaining health; having access to services in local areas for individual patients is key to securing engagement in treatment programmes. For me it’s not about these sole services but the potential there is with pharmacies for the delivery of a wider range of services for the future. Pharmacies are seen as trusted services in local areas.”

Lucia Scally, Senior Public Health Commissioning Manager, Cheshire East Council

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3. NICE, Needle and syringe programmes, PH52 (2014)
How might your local service work?

Creating a safe, regular place where clients can exchange used for clean equipment creates stability in the client’s routine and provides opportunities for pharmacy teams to reinforce harm reduction messages. This might include safe sex advice and guidance on how to prevent overdoses, or complementing existing drug and alcohol services by referring patients to other agencies where further support is available.

East Lancashire’s needle and syringe programme has two levels of operation: the first is where users are provided with standard needle packs, whereas the level two service allows pharmacy teams to offer a wide range of injecting equipment to users in a ‘pick-and-mix’ style.

Commissioners may also decide to incorporate extra dimensions, such as coupling it with a pharmacy supervised consumption service or focusing on certain types of clients as seen in Staffordshire where there is an aim to pick up any clients who may have left rehabilitation services or anyone who is particularly susceptible to drug use such as the homeless.

Performance and image enhancing drug users

A growing cohort of injecting drug users are those who use anabolic steroids and performance enhancing drugs to assist in increased stamina and muscle gain, despite associated side effects such as severe mood swings and heart and liver problems.

Another problem is the large scale infiltration of counterfeit versions into the steroid market. These fake goods may contain much more harmful contents.

Whilst these types of drug are not physically addictive, many users have reported withdrawal like symptoms and injecting equipment is reportedly shared, placing steroid users at a risk of blood-borne virus infection.

Needle and syringe programmes are therefore just as suitable for those injecting non-prescribed anabolic steroids as they are for those who are injecting illicit drugs.