How do injecting drug users perceive needle and syringe programmes?

Kathryn Williams, Amy Wieckowski, Amy Perry, Yvonne Cheng, Matthew Jones and Jenny Scott

Department of Pharmacy and Pharmacology, University of Bath.

**Background**

- Needle and syringe programmes (NSPs) are an effective harm reduction strategy amongst injecting drug users (IDUs)
- However, according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, there is a lack of evidence on how injecting drug users perceive NSPs in the UK and what encourages or discourages them from using such services

**Aims**

- To investigate how IDUs perceive NSPs and what encourages and discourages them from using such services
- To suggest strategies to those providing NSPs to increase the number of IDUs using the service

**Methods**

- 40 IDUs who were either NSP users at Bristol Drugs Project and/or a local pharmacy were recruited in November 2015
- Data collection involved qualitative semi-structured interviews in a private room in a variety of locations
- Interviews transcripts analysed thematically
- Approved by the University of Bath's ethics procedures

**Results**

- Three key themes were identified:
  1. Barriers to NSP use
  2. Incentives for NSP use
  3. Strategies to increase NSP use

**Barriers to NSP use**

- A number of barriers were common to all NSPs:
  - Inconvenient location or opening hours, especially for IDUs living on the outskirts of Bristol
  - Lack of advertising/lack of awareness of advertising
  - Attitude of performance and image enhancing drug injectors

  "You are a drug user and you are a needle user etc. but you do differentiate yourself from... someone that uses recreational!"

- A number of barriers applied mainly to pharmacy NSPs:
  - Stigma from staff and the public, which was linked to a lack of privacy

  "They don't have a separate room... to do the exchange in, it happens over the counter, five people on either side of you”

- Range and quantity of injecting equipment provided
- Refusal to supply new equipment without return of used equipment

**Incentives for NSP use**

- Convenient location and opening hours (including mobile exchange and hostel visits)
- Positive attitude of BDP staff

  "You’re treated as a decent human being. Not as someone who thinks... he’s on crack – he’s a bad person”

- Provision of additional services, e.g. counselling and groups
- Wide range of high quality equipment available from BDP

**Strategies to increase NSP use**

- Extended opening hours, especially on Sundays
- A wider catchment area, possibly via the mobile exchange, home deliveries or involving more pharmacies
- Better advertising of pharmacy and mobile NSPs
- Improving privacy in pharmacies through use of consultation rooms and presentation of a pre-printed card, to avoid asking publically for an exchange
- Education of pharmacy staff to reduce stigma and prevent supply refusal
- Pre-made equipment packs for quicker collections from BDP
- Providing cookers and sterile water

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