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

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We will set up syringe exchange programs for all U.S. jails and prisons in the next 15 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.
### Harm Reduction Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Before Incarceration</th>
<th>During Incarceration</th>
<th>After Incarceration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syringe Access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom Distribution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opioid Substitution Therapy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naloxone Distribution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCV Testing</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV Treatment (including PEP and PrEP)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (though no PrEP and unclear on PEP)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCV Treatment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Consumption Spaces</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-Based Education</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Brief History of Syringe Exchange in Prisons

- First program was initiated in 1992, in Oberschongrun Prison, a men’s prison in Switzerland;

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

- Hindelbank Prison, a women’s prison in Switzerland, became the first sanctioned prison-based syringe exchange program;

- 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Switzerland</th>
<th>8. Tajikistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Germany</td>
<td>9. Kyrgyzstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spain</td>
<td>10. Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Luxembourg</td>
<td>12. Armenia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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).
How to get there

- Enhance community support for harm reduction;
- Enhance political support for harm reduction;
- Shift funding away from punitive approaches to harm reduction;
- Remove legal barriers to the availability of harm reduction in jails and prisons;

AND…
STOP INCARCERATING PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS!
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.
For further discussion

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