Illinois Pharmacist Survey on Non-Prescription Syringe Sales and the Sharps Container Program

Key Findings, Recommendations, and Next Steps

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Background...

- **2003**: IL Syringe Purchase Law passed
  - Permits purchase and possession of 20 syringes by 18+
- **2004**: UIC assessed pharmacists’ awareness of law and attitudes
- **2004**: AFC/IDPH Syringe access & disposal program
- **2007-2008**: Repeated 2004 survey with five new questions
Survey Questions Included...

- Knowledge of legal issues, store policy, and pharmacy board regulations
- Attitudes and opinions on
  - Syringe access as prevention
  - Business concerns for selling
  - Non-prescription purchasing
  - Home and store disposal of used syringes
  - Result of selling syringes to IDUs
  - Provision of education and referrals
  - Influence of fellow pharmacists and pharmacy orgs
- Sales practices
- Demographics of pharmacists, pharmacies, customers
Methodology...

- Survey mailed to pharmacy managers and senior pharmacists at 602 IL pharmacies
  - Approximately 26% of all IL pharmacies
  - Chicago, suburban Chicagoland, high-risk counties, and rural areas
  - 66% overall response rate
  - Final sample = 379
    - Included only complete surveys by commercial/non-hospital pharmacies
Pharmacists’ Attitudes...
Sterile Syringes=Disease Prev

- More than 80% of respondents related to difficulty of quitting drug use.
- Nearly 54% agreed that selling syringes to IDUs will prevent HIV and HCV.
- 30% remain concerned that syringe access would increase drug use, similar to ‘04.
Pharmacists’ Attitudes... Non-Prescription Purchase

- 95% aware of syringe purchase law (77% in ‘04).
- 13% increase in number of pharmacists willing to sell syringes (‘04-51%; ‘07-64%).
- 72% require ID, name, address, sobriety, etc. before selling.
  - 15% increase from ‘04.
- 79% report selling syringes w/o prescription.
- 77% report customers requesting syringes.
Pharmacists’ Attitudes... Unwillingness to Sell

- More than 30% unwilling to sell syringes. Why?
  - Belief that syringe access:
    - Increases drug use
    - Doesn’t prevent HIV or HCV
    - Doesn’t reduce needle sharing
  - Geographic location:
    - Suburban Chicago pharmacists=2.4 times more likely to sell syringes than Chicago counterparts
  - Corporate vs. independent pharmacy
    - Among the 33 pharmacies that did not allow sales of syringes, 82% were independent
Pharmacists Attitudes...

Pharmacists--Partners in Harm Reduction

Most respondents reported willingness to provide information on:

- Injection-related infections (87%)
- Drug overdose (81%)
- Proper disposal of syringes (90%)
- Provide referrals to drug treatment (85%)
- Safer injection practices (58%)
Syringe Disposal Findings

- 43% of IL pharmacies are enrolled in Sharps Container Program.
  - Only 29% say they are enrolled.

- Approximately 25% of pharmacists surveyed expressed willingness to dispose of used syringes.
  - (Consistent with ‘04.)

- 8% increase in willingness to have in-store disposal kiosks
  - (55% v. 47%).
Pharmacists’ Comments...

- 13 respondents suggested that state or federal government fund disposal sites or programs.

- 10 pharmacists expressed disagreement or disapproval of non-prescribed syringe sales or the syringe disposal program.

- 20 respondents requested more information and education for pharmacists.
Conclusions and Recommendations...

- Significant progress has been made since 04, but much remains to do.
- Pharmacists’ attitudes and assumptions about drug users influence decisions to sell syringes.
- Important to help pharmacists see IDUs as interested and willing to adopt health seeking behaviors.
- Tie disposal efforts to the needs of diabetics.
- Explore addition of public syringe disposal at pharmacies that already handle hazardous waste.
Next Steps…

- Revise educational insert
- Continue to utilize teachable moments
- Target outreach
- Continue broad pharmacy education
- Sustain consumer education
- Facilitate connection and communication between pharmacies and NEPs
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