

Identifying Barriers to Dispensing Non-Prescription Syringes: A Survey of Community Pharmacists in North Carolina

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BACKGROUND

- Approximately 56,000 individuals are infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) each year and injection drug users represent 12% of new HIV infections
 - In a recent HIV outbreak in Indiana, most of the newly diagnosed HIV cases were due to intravenous injection of oxymorphone
- Needle Exchange Programs (NEPs) provide sterile syringe access and proper disposal
 - NEPs *reduce* HIV transmission, *reduce* hepatitis C virus (HCV) transmission, and *do not increase* rates of drug use or crime
- Legislation regarding NEPs and non-prescription syringe access varies across the United States
 - In North Carolina, there are only 4 NEPs
 - In North Carolina, a pharmacist has the right to deny the sale of non-prescription syringes

OBJECTIVES

- Identify barriers North Carolina community pharmacists have to dispensing non-prescription syringes
- Identify solutions to overcome these barriers, including tools or education materials

METHODS

Study Design

- Online cross-sectional, 15-item survey distributed via Qualtrics™ for 30 days through the North Carolina Board of Pharmacy
- Reminder e-mail sent at day 15

Inclusion

- All community pharmacists registered with the North Carolina Board of Pharmacy

Exclusion

- Invalid e-mail address
- Pharmacists not practicing in the community setting

SURVEY RETURN

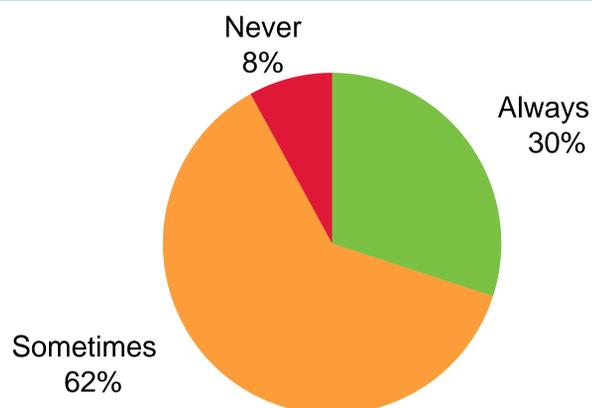


DISCUSSION

- This study is limited to one state (North Carolina) and cannot be extrapolated to the rest of the United States
- Unexpectedly, more pharmacists choose to *always* sell versus *never* selling non-prescription syringes
- Community pharmacists recognize their potential impact for public health and in preventing the spread of HIV/HCV
- Barriers keeping pharmacists from selling non-prescription syringes include personal beliefs, lack of clarity from federal/state regulations, and misperceptions of the customer
- Suggestions for future continuing education for pharmacists include understanding of the mentality of injection drug users and emphasizing the importance or potential impact pharmacists have in bridging the gap to sterile syringe access
- Future areas of research may include pharmacists' understanding of federal and state regulations; clarification of company policies of independent, chain, mass merchant, and supermarket pharmacies; and pharmacists' perceptions of non-prescription syringe sales after the educational campaign

RESULTS

As a Pharmacist, do you sell non-prescription syringes? (N=1,067)



Why do you ALWAYS sell? (n=296)

Public health & HIV/HCV prevention	83%
Personal beliefs	35%
Company policy	29%
Federal and state regulation	9%
Other	7%
Religious beliefs	2%

Top 5 "extremely important" factors in a pharmacist's decision to sell non-prescription syringes (n=557)

Customer's sobriety	282
Federal and state regulations	256
Concern the syringes may be used for illicit drug use	193
If the customer has an insulin prescription	192
Pharmacy company policy	162

Why do you NEVER sell? (n=66)

Personal beliefs	70%
Company policy	44%
Federal and state regulations	6%
Religious beliefs	2%

Needle Exchange Programs (NEPs) (n=904)

Would you support the legalization of NEPs?

YES – 89%

NO – 11%

If there was a NEP near your pharmacy, would you refer your customer to a NEP?

YES – 87%

NO – 13%

Would you support the efforts of updating NC law to clearly state the legalization of retail pharmacies selling non-prescription syringes?

YES – 76%

NO – 24%

CONCLUSIONS

- Community pharmacists can play a crucial role for public health and HIV/HCV prevention
- Legislative update to pharmacy practice in North Carolina is needed to clearly define pharmacists' ability to sell non-prescription syringes
- Needle Exchange Programs need to be legalized to assist in combating the spread of HIV/HCV while educating high-risk patients about their health status and connection into healthcare

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