



Cops, Supes and Sharps

Executive Director's Message



By Bill Sandberg

PREVENTATIVE HEALTH MEASURES improve the quality and longevity of our lives.

Clean drinking water, clean air, modern sanitation, hand washing, tooth brushing, exercise, a healthy diet, immunizations, periodic check ups, smoking cessation, wearing a seat belt, safer tools, and healthy and safe working environments - all are proven practices that save lives and huge sums of money. Some of these measures were quite controversial when first proposed; but, in 2005, no one would argue against their absolute value and proven benefits.

Yet, there is no unanimity on preventive health measures and tools to prevent unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV, hepatitis and other blood-borne diseases. When sex, drugs and alcohol are involved, our communities and our decision makers are often divided. Will readily available condoms promote more sexual activity among our children? What about medicinal marijuana? Should parents be jailed for hosting that graduation party where underage drinking was tolerated but keys to cars were confiscated at the front door? Tough questions.

Here is another one. Should counties implement a new law, SB 1159¹, permitting pharmacies to sell up to 10 clean needles and syringes to anyone over 18 without a prescription?

The SSVMS Public and Environmental Health Committee, Child and Adolescent Health Services Committee and Board of Directors are actively encouraging El Dorado and Sacramento County Supervisors to implement the law. California is one of only three states making it illegal for pharmacies to sell clean needles and syringes. In May, Yolo County Supervisors voted unanimously to implement the law, and will consider putting into operation an additional program - needle exchange. Other counties are taking similar action to implement the law.

SB 1159 was supported by the California Medical Association, the Public Health Officers Association and many other health-related organizations. It puts into practice a proven strategy: Providing clean needles to IV drug users will reduce the spread of hepatitis C, HIV and a host of other nasty blood-borne diseases. These diseases are rising in the unsuspecting heterosexual population. An estimated 15,000 intravenous drug users are in Sacramento County, and they come from *all* walks of life.

If the law is implemented, participating pharmacies would furnish sharps containers, drug abuse and treatment information. In Sacramento County, the estimated implementation cost is less than \$2,000. However, one hepatitis patient will need \$20,000 to \$40,000 annually in health care services.

Sacramento's Board of Supervisors will consider this issue in August or September. Law enforcement has come out hard against this law; we have held several important meetings, and plan more, to encourage their support, answer questions and provide information.

You can help by adding your name to our resolution and by sending a supporting email to your county supervisor. For Sacramento County go to www.bos.saccounty.net/index.html.

For El Dorado County, go to co.el-dorado.ca.us/bos/index.html. Our medical students and physician-members in Yolo County should send their supervisors a special thank you at www.yolocounty.org/org/bos/board.html.

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1. A copy of SB 1159 and the SSVMS supporting resolution can be reviewed at www.ssvms.org/sb1159.

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