



Access to Clean Syringes in the City of Sacramento



By Glennah Trochet, MD

A public health measure turned down by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors appears to be working smoothly in the City of Sacramento.

This is a May 6 report to the City Council of Sacramento on pharmacy sales of clean needles and two needle exchange programs. Initially, the Medical Society and others sought similar programs county-wide, but that recommendation was defeated.

The report below is the original text.

Recommendation: 1) Receive and File the first annual report on Access to Clean Syringes Programs in the City of Sacramento and 2) Direct staff to work with the County Public Health Officer on a plan to deal with syringe disposal as it relates to the syringe exchange programs and the new state law that takes effect September 1, 2008 and return to Mayor and Council for approval of the plan.

Description/Analysis

Issue: In November 2006, the Mayor and City Council approved the over-the-counter pharmacy sales of clean syringes in the City of Sacramento. And in January 2007 the City of Sacramento Mayor and City Council authorized the operation of clean syringe exchange programs in the City of Sacramento. The ordinances required an annual report detailing the status of the programs. This report includes information on blood borne infections associated with needle sharing activities, as well as a description of the implementation of both programs and known outcomes as of February 29, 2007.

In Sacramento, the use of illegal drugs and sharing of syringes is the second most common way in which HIV is transmitted and the most common in which Hepatitis C is transmitted. From the beginning of the epidemic in 1982 until December, 2007, Sacramento County has recorded 3,605 cases of AIDS. Of these 72 % (2,858) were living in the City of Sacramento at the time of the report. As of the end of 2007 there were 1,204 cases of HIV reported in the county, of these, 78% (944) lived in the City of Sacramento at the time the report was made.

It is estimated that 600,000 people in California are infected with Hepatitis C. If this is so, then we project that 22,100 people in Sacramento County must also be infected. In 2007 there were 795 new cases of Hepatitis C reported in Sacramento County, compared to 982 cases reported in 2006. Of these, 554 reported cases in 2006 and 432 reported cases in 2006 lived within the City of Sacramento limits.

Disease Prevention Demonstration Project (DPDP): There are currently twenty-four registered pharmacies participating in the project in the City of Sacramento including thirteen Rite Aid pharmacies, four Longs Drugs pharmacies, five Leader pharmacies, and the Center for AIDS Research and Education Services (CARES) pharmacy. Since the inception of the project, one pharmacy location has dropped out of

the project. The reason given was fear that the project would attract criminal and undesirable patrons to the pharmacy.

Two surveys of pharmacies have taken place, which show that all locations are selling at least 10 syringes per month, and most are averaging 100-500 syringes a month in the DPDP. All pharmacies report distributing the required brochure with each purchase of syringes, most of which are sold in packages of 10. Pharmacies reported very few adverse events: one incident of verbal abuse to the pharmacist by a patron was reported, and a few incidents where the syringes were not sold because the individual requesting to buy was under age.

Syringe Exchange Programs: Two Syringe Exchange programs are in place in the City of Sacramento. Harm Reduction Services (HRS) is a community based organization that works with high risk clients providing education, prevention and HIV and Hepatitis C testing. Their clients include current drug users, men who have sex with men, sex workers and the homeless. Of their clients, 55% are male and 45% female. They range from 25 to 45 years of age, and approximately 45% are people of color. Clean syringes for exchange, and testing services, are available at their office Tuesday through Friday from 10 am to 1 pm and Saturday from 11 am to 5 pm. Also, the HRS outreach van conducts street based services three afternoons a week from 1 to 4:30 pm. and Saturday evenings from 10 pm to 1 am at various locations in the City of Sacramento. HRS staff collects used syringes during outreach contacts. Biohazard waste containers are provided to participants when possible.

HRS hosts the Joan Viteri Memorial Clinic (JVMC) in partnership with the UC Davis Medical School. The clinic's services include abscess treatment, Hepatitis vaccinations and other medical services for injection drug users. It is located at the HRS offices in Oak Park. Clean syringes are distributed, used ones are collected for disposal and clients can also receive various supplies to prevent infections.

From November 2007 to February 2008 HRS distributed 42,000 new syringes. They have vaccinated 40 individuals against Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B and more than 1,500 individuals received information about drug treatment, medical care and how to prevent the spread of blood borne diseases. The JVMC clinic saw more than 400 patients for medical services in 2007. HRS staff is trained to use the rapid HIV test. Out of 140 individuals tested for HIV, three were found to be HIV positive, and were connected to medical treatment and other services.

Safer Alternatives thru Networking and Education (SANE) is the second syringe exchange program. SANE utilizes social network representatives (designated by members of the social network) to deliver the greater part of the HIV risk reduction supplies and prevention education to local injection drug users (IDU.) Social network representatives (SNR), maintain regular, direct contact with SANE staff and systematically deliver education and supplies to other IDU that do not contact SANE directly.

Three staff are available on pager Monday through Saturday, 10 am - 8 pm. A return call to IDU is made within 48 hours of receiving a voice page. During the return phone call a time and place for the contact is arranged. Most frequently, program services are provided in participants' homes and regular gathering places which allow staff to work with IDU on risk reduction strategies in the environment in which they actually use drugs.

Used syringes are collected by staff during outreach (exchange) contacts (usually in biohazardous waste containers provided to participants by SANE) and disposed appropriately. Staff respond to calls from community members who have household-generated waste (e.g., diabetics) or who have seen syringes discarded in public places by traveling to the identified area and collecting the syringes in an appropriate manner (e.g., with gloves, tongs, sharps containers). SANE employees often collect publicly-discarded syringes in their neighborhoods after receiving training in proper collection procedures. IDU are provided with the locations of pharmacies participating in the Disease Prevention Demonstration Project ("pharmacy sales" program).

From February 20, 2007 to February 29, 2008 SANE distributed 149,741 syringes during 605 exchange episodes. One percent of exchanges were conducted with IDU under the age of 30. Forty-six percent of exchanges in this time period were conducted with women and 11% were conducted with women of color. Nineteen percent of exchanges were conducted with people of color (African American 4%, Latina/o 10%, Asian, Native American and other 5%) and 39% were conducted with individuals who reported injecting primarily methamphetamines in the previous six months.

Both syringe exchange programs collect used syringes that are returned either loosely or in containers. Because the containers are not opened, it is difficult to know the number of syringes that are disposed of. Both syringe exchange programs distribute information on the proper disposal of used syringes and HRS distributes labels and instructions to people on how to create their own safe containers. Recently the Health Officer met with waste management staff in the City of Sacramento to discuss the best way to dispose of used syringes.

In addition to syringe disposal for the exchange program, the City will have to address syringe disposal due to a new State law that will be effective as of September 1, 2008. This new law will prohibit residents from disposing of their used syringes in their household garbage cans. Residents will be required to dispose of their syringes at the City's hazardous waste facility or other qualified sites. Currently, residents are allowed to place their used syringes in their garbage cans as long as they are in appropriate containers. It is unknown at this time what the total impact will be for the City when this new law takes effect. However, staff expects that there will have to be a public educational component for this change in law as well as some coordination with the private sector and medical sector to maximize disposal drop off sites within the City.

We would note that the City of Sacramento Police Department and the City's Parks and Recreation Department have had no incidents reported to them related to either the Pharmacy Sales of Syringes or the Needle Exchange programs. In addition, according to the District Attorney's office there have been no adverse events reported to them regarding pharmacy sales of syringes or syringe exchange programs.

Policy Considerations: The State of California Office of AIDS is tasked with the evaluation of the Disease Prevention Demonstration Program, prior to 2010, when the authorizing legislation sunsets. Syringe exchange programs are recognized in the Public Health literature as a valuable adjunct to other programs to decrease the spread of HIV, Hepatitis C and other blood borne diseases.

Environmental Considerations: None

Rationale for Recommendation: Receive and file.

Financial Considerations: Due to the success of one of the syringe exchange programs to date and the ramping up of the second syringe program there is a possible cost to the City when the programs are fully implemented. Staff is recommending that we come back to Mayor and Council after a year's worth of data to provide a better estimate on any financial impacts of the programs. In addition, staff will also have a better understanding of the cost implications of the new state law which will prohibit residents from discarding syringes in their household garbage cans. Staff recommends that Mayor and Council direct staff to work with the County Public Health Officer on a plan to deal with syringe disposal as it relates to the syringe exchange programs and the new state law that takes effect September 1, 2008 and return to Mayor and Council for approval of the plan.

Emerging Small Business Development (ESBD): N/A

Submitted by: Dr. Glennah Trochet
County of Sacramento Public Health Officer

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved