

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

Overview of Harm Reduction Programs – August 2013

Harm reduction programs at Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC), first and foremost, recognize the intrinsic value and dignity of human beings. Programs and services at RHAC are designed to maximize social and health assistance, disease prevention and education, while minimizing repressive and punitive measures.

These programs and services include, but are not limited to:

- **Counterpoint Needle & Syringe Program** – (Middlesex-London Health Unit (MLHU) Funding). The Counterpoint Needle & Syringe program consists of a fixed site at RHAC, as well as satellite sites at MLHU and My Sisters' Place. The Counterpoint staff and volunteers work with injection drug users to reduce the risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C (HCV) and other blood borne infections by: educating drug users about the health risks associated with injection drug use; providing information and materials to practice safer drug use and safer sex; and making referrals to other social services and health care agencies. Counterpoint services also include an Injection Drug Use (IDU) Outreach Worker who provides a full range of services including distribution of harm reduction materials, as well as information and support through street and mobile outreach using the agency van.
- **Comprehensive Hepatitis C Care Team (HCCT)** - (Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Funding). The HCCT is provided in partnership with London Intercommunity Health Centre and consists of a medical team (doctors, psychiatrist, nurse practitioner), as well as a social worker, an outreach worker, and a peer support worker. The Team addresses the needs of Londoners who are at risk of contracting hepatitis C or who are living with hepatitis C. The outreach worker and the peer support worker are housed at RHAC, and in conjunction with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)-funded HCV educator, they provide regular outreach at a number of sites throughout the city including: Elgin Middlesex Detention Centre (women & men), Atlosha Native Family Healing Services, Youth Action Centre, My Sisters' Place, and London InterCommunity Health Centre Identification Clinic.
- **An IDU Peer Engagement Worker** - Through our partnership and funding from London CAREs, the IDU Peer Engagement worker hires and supervises a team of nine peers (current or former drug users) on rotational shifts who regularly do sweeps of key areas in the city to recover any discarded drug use equipment. Through London CAREs, RHAC also oversees the maintenance of 13 needle disposal bins throughout the city.
- **The engagement of 23 peers** - This peer group is involved in a variety of outreach activities including syringe recovery, IDU outreach, HCV Education, HCV/HIV support group and Lunch 'n Learn facilitation, and provide assistance within the onsite needle & syringe program.
- **Comprehensive HIV team** – This team consists of two case managers and a peer support worker. They work closely with an onsite psychiatrist as well as staff at Infectious Diseases Care Program (IDCP), John Gordon Home, Options Anonymous Testing and MLHU.
- **Community partners** – Community partners provide onsite harm reduction services to clients at RHAC including but not limited to: bi-weekly Anonymous HIV testing; weekly HCV testing; weekly Wound Care & Skin Infections Clinic; and the annual influenza vaccine program (last year through MLHU).

New Data Collection System

In April 2013, through the support of MLHU, the Counterpoint Needle & Syringe Program launched a new data collection system called NEO. NEO was developed in Wales in 2010 and is designed to enable more comprehensive and reliable collection of data from individuals accessing harm reduction materials. Using the database in Counterpoint allows frontline staff to work more effectively with clients to be able to deliver specific and individually tailored harm reduction information and to provide referrals to other services. RHAC is able to more accurately and efficiently track supplies, returns, referrals and client demographics while maintaining confidentiality and anonymity. This program is internet based, therefore providing the end user the opportunity to use it at multiple locations and in a mobile unit.

Products distributed at the Counterpoint Needle & Syringe Program

Needles and syringes for the Counterpoint Needle & Syringe Program are purchased by the local program. Other materials are provided to all provincial needle and syringe programs through the Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program (OHRDP). They consist of the following:

- Alcohol swabs, Baggies for filters, Filters, Spoons (cookers), Stericups, Sterile water for injection
Sterile water for inhalation, Tourniquets, Vitamin C

Counterpoint People Served

Unique Individuals since implementation of New Data Base --April 2013 to August 2013 – RHAC Site

Male	1180	75%
Female	392	25%
Total	1574	100%

Number of cumulative visits since implementation of New Data Base – April 2013 to August 2013 – RHAC Site

Male	6453	76%
Female	1979	24%
Total	8432	100%

*IDU Mobile Outreach (AIDS Bureau Funded) July 1 2012 to June 30 2013 **

Number of Contacts	
Male	951
Female	916
Total	1,867

**Data is different time frame - not yet part of NEO data base (in transition)*

Statistical Data on Needles/Syringes -- July 1 2012 to June 30 2013

Program	Needles/Syringes In	Needles/Syringes Out
Counterpoint – Fixed Site	416,227	1,455,449
Counterpoint – Mobile Outreach	640,529	637,670
Middlesex-London Health Unit	11,556	58,350
My Sisters' Place	0	58,766
London CARES	172,073	0
Total	1,240,385	2,210,235

**New data tracking in NEO reflects our current needle/syringe return rate at 68%*

Drug Trends & Health Issues

- Increase in use of crystal meth (more affordable, keeps people up at night and sometimes eases withdrawal from opiate use) which brings unique health related concerns (picking at skin, becoming infected). Abscess related concerns are among the highest we have seen, as well as crystal meth induced psychosis.
- Clients have identified differences in the crystal meth they are using - a few dealers are mixing opiates with crystal meth which results in a different high.
- Reports of EPSOM SALTS being passed off as crystal meth. Injecting this mix has resulted in serious side effects requiring hospitalization.
- Emerging trend of endocarditis developing in younger IDU population (in their twenties and thirties)

Issues in Community

- Negative press re: syringes in alleyway in east London
- Community reaction to methadone clinics - creating barriers to access
- Public injection drug use