

Well Pharmacy Pick n Mix Needle Exchange Pilot

Introduction

Following the South Dartmoor and West Devon Community Safety Partnership meeting for 14th March 2018 concerns were raised about the volume and frequency of drug litter found in the community between Nov 2017-March 2018. At the meeting it was established that the Police, Housing, the Specialist Substance Misuse service and anti-social behaviour teams were likely to know the handful of individuals causing most of the problem. These agencies agreed to meet and agree a consistent message to give to the individuals with the aim of reducing drug litter finds. In addition, Public Health Devon agreed to review the needle and syringe exchange programme (NSP) at Well Pharmacy in Totnes. This report provides an insight into the approach taken and results shared by Exchange Supplies who supported the implementation of the pilot programme.

Needle and Syringe supply programmes (NSP) are funded by Public Health in local authorities, and the main aim is to reduce the transmission of viruses and other infections caused by sharing injecting equipment, such as HIV, hepatitis B and C. In turn, this will reduce the prevalence of blood-borne viruses and bacterial infections, so benefiting wider society.

Prior to May 2018, the Well Pharmacy in Totnes provided a choice of red or yellow packs of needles for injecting drug users to take away. It was known that often the packs contained more needles than customers required, and subsequently unused needles were often being found in the local community of Totnes in public spaces.

The Pharmacy Team were very approachable and keen to trial a 'pick n mix' exchange service which enables injecting drug users to take only the equipment they need or want, reducing the chances of disposing of unused equipment inappropriately.

Staff Training

The staff NSP training day on 4th May was held at the pharmacy. The staff were split into two groups to ensure that normal counter service could continue. We covered:

- the background to why we have NSP in community pharmacies
- Blood Borne Virus risks and injecting risks/injuries - what to look out for.
- equipment selection, what's in the packs
- types of drugs used opiates/steroids
- importance of needle size
- low dead space equipment (to reduce BBV transmission even further)
- "cooking up"
- foil use for smoking as an alternative to injecting and how to make a foil pipe.
- Brief interventions including; hand washing, resting/rotating injecting sites, smoking etc. Exchange Supplies webshop ordering.

Results of the Pilot

The pilot programme started on 7th May 2018 and the tables on page 2 show the differences in exchanges pre and during the pilot.

We've used 2017 and 2018 data to take into consideration the seasonal variation, due to the increased number of visitors to Totnes in the summer months. The breakdown for July and Aug 2018 quarterly data is not available until the end of September, these two months have been added together for 2017 and 2018 for comparison.

The transaction data below is taken from PharmaOutcomes.

	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Apr 17	May 17	Jun 17	July/ Aug17
Red 1ml pack	134	120	93	67	83	98	154
Yellow pack	38	30	46	48	63	75	142

	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	July/Aug 18
Red 1ml pack	110	105	116	96	64	67	131
Yellow pack	55	63	57	52	48	35	53
Pick n Mix	0	0	0	0	32	90	256

The data shows how Pick n Mix is the most preferred method of exchange amongst the drug injecting community, and that the numbers requesting red and yellow packs is reducing during the pilot programme.

Views of the staff and the changes identified by the Pharmacy Team

The staff felt that they had benefited from the training by understanding the equipment and how it's used, which has given them more confidence with NSP.

One member of staff has been at the pharmacy for 7 years and had not previously had any NSP training. She said they had opened packs and looked inside, but the contents did not offer any explanation about what the equipment was for (this is not an uncommon situation).

The staff said that they were able to have a longer conversation with the clients and that there was an appreciation by the clients that they were now able to pick up the equipment they needed. There were no signs of impatience due to the extra time taken for the pick n mix items being gathered and bagged up. Some pick n mix transaction quantities can be as low as 2 to 4 x 1ml fixed syringes at a time, these clients prefer to come in regularly.

The pharmacy has also had new client registrations for foil only, and no other equipment taken by these clients, once the word spread that foil was available.

On Fridays and Saturdays, they have a noticeable increase in the number of pick n mix transactions as it appears clients are planning ahead for the weekend pharmacy hours (closed Sundays).

The core group of clients are known by sight to all the staff.

Views of the clients on the change to pick n mix.

Initial feedback from the regular clients during the first few weeks was a sense of relief at not having to carry pharmacy packs around anymore. These clients immediately switched to pick n mix. They also like the discretion of carrying smaller amounts of equipment. The availability of spoons has been popular as well. No one has asked for water for injection.

There is a very good relationship between the clients and the staff at Well Pharmacy.

Anything else of interest.

Return rates appear to be around the same, the staff are aware that they need to keep reminding the clients to bring their returns back.

Since the pilot started the staff can only recall two drug related litter incidences reported to them. A member of public found an unused 1ml syringe (it was assumed it had been dropped by mistake) and one local police officer brought some discarded equipment in. The general consensus is that drug related litter has been reduced in Totnes and pick n mix should be continued at the pharmacy.

The outreach worker based at Newton Abbot for Together Devon is intending to visit the pharmacy having been briefed on the pilot programme by the NSP provider Exchange supplies.

Thanks to Louise Evans at Exchange Supplies for the delivery of the training and the timely reporting to Public Health Devon, Aneta the lead Pharmacist and her team at Well Pharmacy Totnes for their professionalism and embracement of the Pick n Mix pilot programme and ongoing support to the local community.

The Future

Public Health Devon is proposing to continue to fund the Pick n Mix programme from Well Pharmacy in Totnes and adopt this approach in other areas of Devon where needle finds are known to be of concern.

As of 1st October 2018, there will be a new needle exchange service provider, Orion Medical. Orion and Exchange Supplies are working very closely to ensure a smooth transition of the contract. Orion are in the process of visiting all Pharmacy sites in Devon to make them aware of their service and the process for ordering equipment. Early indications from Pharmacists in Devon are that they are impressed with the offer from Orion.