

Wiping Out Hep C in New Mexico

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Harm Reduction

In this, our sixth newsletter since January 2007, we examine Harm Reduction and its relationship to hepatitis C prevention efforts. For those unfamiliar with the concept, please read the explanation below, excerpted from the Drug Policy Alliance website (www.drugpolicy.org).

Harm reduction is a public health philosophy that seeks to lessen the dangers that drug abuse and our drug policies cause to society. A harm reduction strategy is a comprehensive approach to drug abuse and drug policy. Its complexity lends to its misperception as a drug legalization tool. Harm reduction rests on several basic assumptions. A basic tenet is that there has never been, is not now, and never will be a drug-free society. A harm reduction strategy seeks pragmatic solutions to the harm that drugs and drug policies cause. This approach acknowledges that there is no ultimate solution to the problem of drugs in a free society, and that many different interventions may work. Those interventions should be based on science, compassion, health and human rights. The strategy demands new outcome measurements. Whereas the success of current drug policies is primarily measured by the change in use rates, the success of a harm reduction strategy is measured by the change in rates of death, disease, crime and suffering. Because incarceration does little to reduce the harms that ever-present drugs cause to our society, a harm reduction approach favors treatment of drug addiction by health

care professionals over incarceration in the penal system. Because some drugs, such as marijuana, have proven medicinal uses, a harm reduction strategy not only seeks to reduce the harm that drugs cause, but also to maximize their potential benefits. A harm reduction strategy recognizes that some drugs, such as marijuana, are less harmful than others, such as cocaine and alcohol. Harm reduction mandates that the emphasis on intervention should be based on the relative harmfulness of the drug to society. This approach advocates lessening the harms of drugs through education, prevention, and treatment. Harm reduction seeks to reduce the harms of drug policies dependent on an over-emphasis on interdiction, such as arrest, incarceration, establishment of a felony record, lack of treatment, lack of adequate information about drugs, the expansion of military source control intervention efforts in other countries, and intrusion on personal freedoms. Harm reduction also seeks to reduce the harms caused by an over-emphasis on prohibition, such as increased purity, black market adulterants, black market sale to minors, and black market crime. A harm reduction strategy seeks to protect youth from the dangers of drugs by offering factual, science-based drug education and eliminating youth's black market exposure to drugs. Finally, harm reduction seeks to restore basic human dignity to dealing with the disease of addiction.

Update on Harm Reduction in NM

Bernie Lieving

*Coordinator, Harm Reduction Program
New Mexico Department of Health*

The New Mexico Department of Health Harm Reduction Program is growing in leaps and bounds. This summer, I'll be traveling around the state to roll-out a new training for overdose prevention and Narcan administration. Due to a national shortage of injectable Narcan, the program and its contractors will now use an intranasal device that delivers the medicine to an overdosing person via the nostrils. Discontinuance of the injectable form of Narcan, will, by default, diminish the risk for disease transmission, including hepatitis C. It is also my hope this new route of administration will increase the interest of needle-phobic friends and family members of opiate users to be trained in overdose prevention.

As many of you may know, as of July 1st, the Harm Reduction Program will be the departmental home of the Medical Cannabis Program. Although hepatitis C is not listed as one of the medical conditions covered by the Lynn & Erin Compassionate Use Act of 2007, it is anticipated that medical providers and people living with hepatitis C or undergoing hepatitis C treatment, will petition the program to have hepatitis C added to the list of approved medical conditions. The use of medical cannabis for people living with hepatitis C seems to make clinical sense as corroborated in Volume 18 of *European Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology*

(2006). Researchers in Canada found that individuals who used marijuana during the course of their hepatitis C treatment were "significantly more likely to indicate adherence to HCV treatment and, consequently were more likely to achieve a sustained virological response (SVR) than cannabis non-users in the sample." More research with larger sample sizes needs to be completed, but this study highlights some interesting findings.

Lastly, I'm thrilled about our burgeoning partnership with the New Mexico Hepatitis C Alliance. Thanks to the board for approving the "Prevent Hepatitis C – Don't Share Anything" lighters for our syringe exchange participants, and a special thank you to Gavriela and Stephani for their ongoing support, collaboration and enthusiasm for harm reduction. See you at the annual meeting in September!

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To contribute an article or a letter to the editor, please email us at

**info@nmhepc.org or send to
NMHCA, P.O. Box 6601,
Albuquerque, NM 87197**

**SAVE THE DATE
THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 20
NEW MEXICO
HEP C ALLIANCE
ANNUAL
MEETING
8 AM - 5 PM
INDIAN PUEBLO
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CENTER
ALBUQUERQUE**
Watch for additional
information in July at
www.nmhepc.org

What Will You Make Real in Your World Today?

There are so many possibilities.

Will you focus so heavily on your fears that you create and empower the very things you fear? Or will you fill yourself with positive visions that your awareness and actions can then bring to life?

The expectations you have carry a great amount of power. So choose today to expect the best you can imagine in every situation. Your thoughts attract people, objects and circumstances that closely match those thoughts. Be sure to make them peaceful, positive and empowering thoughts, and they'll be faithfully reflected in your world.

The way you see things determines what you see, and what you see determines the substance that your life creates. Make it a meaningful, fulfilling substance. The reality of this day will come largely from the way you think, feel, learn, respond, observe and act. Choose to make it the best one yet.

—Ralph Marston

Hep C Prevention Education is Key!

*Karen Gonzales
Hepatitis C Coordinator
New Mexico Department of Health*

The NM Department of Health estimates that between 24,000 – 28,000 people in New Mexico are chronically infected with hepatitis C. The hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is spread through contact with infected blood. You could be at risk for HCV if you have received a blood transfusion before July 1992, ever injected drugs, or shared needles or ink wells for body piercing or tattoos. There is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C, but medical care to manage the infection, including treatment is available. It is important to remember, while treatment may clear the virus from your system, it will not protect you against future infection. Education of people at risk for infection, healthcare providers, harm reduction service providers, and community members is essential to reducing the spread of the virus as well and reducing the negative health consequences associated with HCV.

Beginning in June 2007, the Hepatitis and Harm Reduction Programs will provide a series of HCV Train the Trainer Workshops throughout New Mexico. The trainings will utilize a nationally recognized curriculum developed by the Hepatitis C Support Project (HCSP). HCSP is a non-profit organization based in San Francisco, CA that is dedicated to promoting hepatitis education and awareness. This full day training will provide information on HCV disease process, routes of transmission, prevention methods, available treatment options, and community resources. Nursing and Social Work continuing education credits are available. If you are

interested in attending, contact Karen Gonzales at (505) 476-3076 for more information.

2007 TRAINING SCHEDULE

June 8 – Albuquerque, NM

June 29 – Santa Fe, NM

August 10 – Roswell, NM

September 14 – Socorro, NM

The rate of HCV infection among injection drug using community in NM is astronomical. Eighty-two percent of injection drug users are HCV positive, based on a seroprevalence study conducted among IDUs in NM during 1994-1997. In a continued effort to educate this community about the importance of using clean needles and works, the NM Hepatitis C Alliance partnered with the NM Harm Reduction Program to distribute 500 cigarette lighters bearing the message “Prevent Hepatitis C Don't Share Anything” to NMDOH contracted Harm Reduction Sites. The lighters were a huge success. Great job NMHCA and NMDOH Harm Reduction Program for reaching out to a population that is at highest risk for acquiring HCV infection!

ABOUT HEP C

Hepatitis C is a major global public health problem. According to the World Health Organization, more than 170 million people worldwide are chronically infected with HCV, and three to four million new HCV infections occur annually. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that in the United States approximately 3.2 million people are chronically infected with HCV and approximately 25,000 new patients are infected each year. It is estimated that 10,000 to 12,000 patients die annually in the United States from complications resulting from HCV infection. The current standard of

care for treating chronic hepatitis C is combination therapy consisting of pegylated alpha interferon and ribavirin.

ABOUT OMEGA DUROS THERAPY

Omega DUROS therapy is being developed to improve the treatment of HCV by offering a more convenient and potentially safer and more effective treatment. Omega DUROS therapy is designed to deliver a continuous and consistent dose of omega interferon for three months via the implantable DUROS device, a drug delivery technology developed by ALZA Corporation, and licensed to Intarcia for use in certain broad fields. Another product incorporating the DUROS technology has already been approved by the FDA for the palliative treatment of prostate cancer. Intarcia is also leveraging the DUROS technology in evaluating other drug development opportunities. The most advanced of these is focused on the delivery of GLP-1 and GLP-1 analogs with the DUROS device for the treatment of type 2 diabetes.

Both of the articles above are excerpted from HCAAdvocate.



**NEW MEXICO
HEPATITIS C
ALLIANCE**

OUR MISSION: To create, coordinate and inspire participation that will bring individual, community, state, and national awareness and resources to hepatitis C prevention and treatment

OUR VISION: A compassionate, non-judgmental society that ensures education and universal, equitable access to resources to prevent, manage, and cure HCV infection, and support all those infected and affected by this disease