

## **YARRA DRUG AND HEALTH FORUM**

# **Controlled NSP in Prison: Prospects of a trial?**

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## **Former Victorian Corrections Minister**

“There is no more strictly controlled and policed environment in which to ensure a drug regime does not exist than in the prison system ... Despite that, the most drug-rife area in our society is our prison system”.

### **Justice Michael Kirby**

“unless governments, and prison administrators can absolutely guarantee a totally drug-free environment, it is their plain duty to face up to the risks of the spread of HIV infection by the use of unsterile injecting equipment in prisons”

## Prison health is public health

- Almost 30,000 people are incarcerated in Australian prisons at any one time.
- Estimated 50,405 episodes of prisoners being released back into the community 2007/2008.
- 48% of prison entrants had injected at least weekly 2007

### **Health of Australian Prisoners Survey (new entrants)**

- 37% reported having a mental health disorder at some time
- 18% currently taking medication for a mental health condition.
- 71% of prison entrants had used illicit drugs prior 12 months

## Needle sharing and consequences

### 2010 study in NSW prisons (Dolan et al)

- 33.6% of previous injectors continued to inject
- Among those, 90% reported sharing needles;
- HCV sero-incidence at 34.2 per 100 person years

“We could say that **ONE IN THREE people injecting drugs in prisons contracted hepatitis C** and the situation is likely to be similar in Canberra” – Associate Professor Kate Dolan

# **Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council 2010**

## **Call for prison NSP trial**

### **National HIV and National hepatitis C strategies (2010-2013)**

*“it is appropriate throughout the life of this strategy for State and Territory Governments to identify opportunities for trialling the intervention in Australian custodial settings”*

**Where prison NSP has been established**  
*“has not led to an increase in drug use” – Lancet 2009*

- No observable increase in injecting or other forms of drug use;
- Reduced blood-borne virus transmission;
- Reduced needle-sharing and re-use;
- Reduced injecting-related health concerns such as abscesses;
- Reduction in needle-stick injuries for prisoners and staff;
- No instances recorded of needles being used as weapons;
- Acceptance by staff and prisoners.

## **Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia 2004**

Clause 2.26 states that:

*“Every prisoner is to have access to evidence-based health services provided by a competent, registered health professional who will provide a standard of health services comparable to that of the general community”.*

## The 2007 ACT Corrections Management Act states:

(I) The chief executive must ensure that —

(a) detainees have a standard of health care **equivalent to that available to other people in the ACT**; and

(b) arrangements are made to ensure the provision of appropriate health services for detainees; and

(c) conditions in detention promote the health and wellbeing of detainees; and

(d) as far as practicable, **detainees are not exposed to risks of infection.**

## **ACT Health Minister, Ms Kate Gallagher:**

### **Alistair Machonachie Centre in ACT**

- Among inmates tested “65 percent had hepatitis C”
- “first case where there is evidence to support transmission of hepatitis C while in the AMC”
- ‘... *from a health point of view, it is a no-brainer, you would have a syringe program in the jail as soon as you can*’ – May 2010.



## EDITORIAL

*“Prisoners do return to the community.*

*Should we not do our utmost to ensure they do not reoffend?*

*Should we not also prevent the spread of disease both within and outside the prison walls?*

*The ACT Government set a benchmark with the AMC.*

*A trial needle exchange program, in consultation with prison staff, would continue that spirit of reform”*

## **OH and S: needles as weapons?**

*“The infection of any prison officer by the isolated act of a prisoner is most unpalatable ....*

*The infection of a person who is in the custody of society ... is just as unpalatable.*

*... we must take all proper steps to protect prison officers and prisoners alike ....*

*.... by protecting them we protect society”.*

***Justice Michael Kirby***

## **Recent sites visits to Europe**

- **Switzerland – Geneva and Bern**
- **Spain – Barcelona**

**Syringes not a security threat**

**“a wussy weapon’**

## **Some impressions**

- a) Guard resistance still a factor**
  
- b) Low distribution of needles**
  
- c) A medium and low security setting intervention**
  
- d) Lack of detailed understanding of actual models in Australia**

## **Where to from here?**

- Review of AMC scheduled for late 2010.
  
- Legal challenge could possibly arise.

THANK YOU  
&  
QUESTIONS