Scottish Harm Reduction Program Scale-up Lowers Hep C Cases

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A comprehensive harm reduction program instituted by the Scottish government in 2008 has sharply reduced the incidence of hepatitis C virus (HCV) among injection drug users (IDUs), aidsmap reports. Publishing their findings in PLOS ONE, researchers studied 8,000 IDUs who were recruited into three separate cross-sectional studies between 2008 and 2012.

The Scottish initiative involved distributing sterile injection packs while amping up opioid substitution therapy programs. Access to sterile injection equipment did improve over time, and more IDUs accessed opioid substitution therapy.

There were 53 new cases of hep C among the study participants. The rate of new cases dropped from 13.6 per 100 person years in 2008 and 2009, to 7.3 per 100 person years in 2011 and 2012. A high level of access to clean syringes and injecting paraphernalia, when compared with a low level of access, was associated with an 86 percent reduced risk of acquiring hep C.

The researchers estimated that scaling up harm reduction programs averted 1,400 new cases of hep C and 1,000 chronic infections with the virus between 2008 and 2012.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the study, click here.

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