Piercers and Needle Exchanges in Ohio Team Up to Fight Hepatitis C

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This summer, organizers of a needle exchange site in Columbus, Ohio, partnered with local piercing providers in order to help prevent the spread of hepatitis C virus (HCV), HIV and other blood-borne illnesses across the region, The Columbus Underground reports.

For the initiative, Equitas Health, whose Safe Point program provides clean needles and addiction treatment resources throughout central Ohio, teamed with Piercology, a local chain of piercing studios. Through the partnership Safe Point is receiving thousands of dollars to raise awareness about the risks of getting tattoos and piercings from unlicensed vendors and to urge clients to get tested if they're unsure about the safety of the ink or piercings they received in the past.

Piercology's owner has previously worked with state and local health departments to instruct inspectors on what to look for in piercing and tattoo studios to stop the transmission of HIV and hep C. Similarly, with permission from the Ohio Department of Health, Safe Point works to reduce the use of dirty needles, doling out clean syringes along with bandages, alcohol pads and other injection equipment to injection drug users in order to cut back on the risk of transmission.

Since the program began in June, $2 from every piercing at Piercology parlors has gone toward Safe Point initiatives. By the time the partnership ends on September 15, local piercers say they will have raised more than $6,000 for the harm reduction program.

Moving forward, Safe Point and Piercology say they will push other businesses to become more involved in ending the region's ongoing heroin and HCV crises and to provide more support and safer options for those struggling with opioid addiction.

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