Better to Focus on Pleasure, Not Risks, In Safe Injection Promotion?

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Harm reduction programs for injection drug users (IDUs) that focus on risks might be more effective if they instead highlighted pleasure, aidsmap reports. Magdalena Harris, PhD, MSc, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, conducted in-depth interviews with 35 hepatitis C virus (HCV)-negative long-time IDUs in London. She presented her findings at the HIT Hot Topics Conference in Liverpool.

The participants reported that a major reason not to reuse a needle is that once it has punctured the skin it becomes blunt, and is painful and takes longer to use for additional injections. Furthermore, reused needles are more likely to lead to stigmatizing scars or track marks, and can damage veins, making it more difficult to inject in the future.

The users generally said they preferred to inject at home, because they find the experience more relaxing and enjoyable. Some reported preferring to mix their own drugs because this made shooting up a badly prepared drug concoction less likely.

Harris argued that harm reduction programs that focus on more short-term, pleasure and physical function-related incentives are more likely to succeed than scare tactics that address more distant health problems. A comparison is safer sex harm-reduction messages for gay men that highlight sexual pleasure over fear of contagion.

To watch a video of the presentation, click here.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

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