

Advocating for Syringe Service Programs to Reduce HIV in Dentistry

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Abstract:

The misuse of prescription and non-prescription opioids has exacerbated the opioid epidemic in the United States and contributed to rising HIV transmission due to unsterile needle sharing among users. Syringe service programs (SSPs) have emerged as a key public health intervention to address this crisis. A systematic literature review was conducted to identify research addressing the intersection of syringe service programs (SSPs) and dental healthcare. Three major databases were utilized for this review: PubMed, Google Scholar, and the Cochrane Library. Of the total articles retrieved, only 6.80% mentioned both SSPs or syringe exchange programs and dental healthcare. Limited information exists on SSPs in dental healthcare, suggesting few dental providers inform opioid positive patients about these programs. However, research shows that SSPs increase access to sterile syringes, promote safer injection practices to reduce HIV, offer peer recovery coaching or on-site counseling, and connect participants to addiction treatment programs, such as medication-assisted treatment to set recovery goals. Studies indicate that SSP participants are more likely to enroll and remain in substance use disorder treatment programs, particularly when combined with overdose reversal drugs and mental health services. Additionally, studies show that SSPs do not increase crime rates and are cost-effective, as HIV prevention through SSPs costs less than treatment. This paper examines the SSPs' (syringe service programs) effectiveness in reducing HIV transmission, their cost-effectiveness, safety, and their broader role in providing drug abuse treatment and support services; it also advocates for increased federal funding and greater promotion by dentists to expand SSPs' impact, helping reduce the opioid epidemic's health burden.