CORPORATION OF THE COUNTY OF HURON

Health Unit

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Shelley Spencer, Senior Public Health Nurse, Michelle Carter, Public Health Nurse and Tanya Sangster, Public Health Manager
DATE: September 2016
SUBJECT: Needle Exchange Program

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Health accept this report of September 1st 2016 as presented for information.

BACKGROUND

In October of 2013 a report was presented to the Huron County Board of Health regarding the introduction of a harm reduction strategy. With approval from the Board, the Needle Exchange Program (NEP) has been operating with the support of our community partners.
Progress of this program was reported to the Board of Health in November of 2014. This report is to describe the events that have taken place since then.

Who we are: Shelley Spencer, Senior Public Health Nurse is the lead for the Needle Exchange Program. The nurses of the Sexual Health and School Health team also support this program.

What we do: We ensure that priority populations have access to harm reduction services to reduce the transmission of blood-borne infections, as well as opportunity for screening for existing disease.

We ensure that all Huron harm reduction partnerships are provided supplies for client distribution.
Harm reduction equipment can be accessed in the following ways:

- The Huron County Health Unit - Wednesday and Friday 12:00pm-4:00pm
    - Clients also drop by the Clinton Health Unit office at times that are convenient to them when unable on Wednesday or Friday afternoons. Each interaction is face to face with Harm Reduction program staff.
- Choices for Change in Goderich, Tuesday and Thursday 6pm-8pm.
- Choices for Change staff also have “hit kits” with them while working at community satellite offices.
- Dr. Datema’s Methadone clinic in Seaforth.

Why we do harm reduction:

The Ontario Harm Reduction Distribution Program **(OHRPD) states;**

Harm reduction is a range of practical strategies and ideas focused on reducing the harmful consequences associated with drug use and other risky health behaviours. The principle of harm reduction is grounded in social justice and emphasizes respecting the rights of an individual to choice and addressing the inequalities of health and wellbeing in the drug using community.

Harm reduction strategies, surrounding drug use, recognize that abstaining from drugs may not be realistic or even desirable for everyone. Harm reduction strategies are community-based, user-driven, non-judgmental and address systems that isolate and marginalize individuals[1].

Statistics for the Needle Exchange Program in Huron County (from all sites)

January 2015-December 2016

Client Demographics

	Male	Female
Number of contacts*	71	70
Number of new contacts	16	8
Average age of clients	30	36

* Contacts: the number of individual visits to the Needle Exchange Program for needle/syringe exchanges as well as for other services.

Needle Exchange Statistics

Total number of needles taken in	44500
Total number of needles given out	27500
Return rate: $\frac{\text{total \# taken in}}{\text{total \# given out}} \times 100$	162%

Note: Best Practice of a NEP does not require a true exchange (needle for needle).

Disposal

The Huron County Health Unit and our NEP partnership sites have a strong relationship with our local pharmacies. Clients are encouraged to bring sharps containers back to the NEP site for disposal or to one of their local pharmacies. Free sharps containers are available at pharmacies throughout the county, provided through Stericycle.

Central Huron Landfill accepts hazardous waste for free year round.
Surrounding counties NEP programs also receive Huron resident's used needles.

A disposal drop box is accessible 24 hours a day for safe disposal located outside the Health and Library complex building. The previously proposed sharps drop box at the CAMH building in Goderich was unable to be placed due to logistics of location.
As a result, a second drop box is now available for placement within a municipality willing to accommodate the safe disposal unit.

Communication with the town of Goderich continues regarding the placement of sharps containers in high tourist traffic areas, such as the bathrooms and change rooms at the beach and marina. Decreased issues and concerns have been noted by parks staff since the installation of sharps containers in 2014.

In August 2016, the Harm reduction program was able to support the Grand Bend and Goderich beach “butt clean-up”, a Huron Tobacco Prevention program and Lake Huron Center for Coastal Conservation initiative, by providing education materials, sharps containers, tongs etc. for volunteers conducting the clean-up. There were no sharps found at either beach clean-up.

Moving forward

There has been an increase in supplies accessed and new clients to the program both male and female 2015 to present. The Harm reduction program continues to receive requests from community agencies to assist residents accessing harm reduction supplies. Awareness of the service among intravenous drug users and community partners has increased across Huron and neighbouring counties.

There have been recent successes with fostering trust and increased dialogue between staff and clients who access the clinic: client referrals for blood borne disease testing at the Huron County Health Unit’s Sexual Health clinic have resulted. The nurses working in the harm reduction program also continue to make referrals to outside community agencies when need identified by clients.

Routinely a review of program logistics, service need and type of supplies offered in the harm reduction clinic is conducted. Safe inhalation equipment & distribution in Huron remains in discussion, but not currently offered.

Collaboration and education opportunities with county building services department have been identified. NEP staff will provide in servicing fall 2016 to building service staff regarding harm reduction and safe disposal, safe handling of waste and prevention of disease through vaccination. Small metal needle disposal containers are present in a number of county buildings (Health and Library complex, the Court House…)

Ongoing relationship building with community partners such as local and regional OPP, Wingham Police, other county departments, municipalities, and pharmacies continues.

In summary, our harm reduction program strives to continue to meet the needs of one of Huron's most vulnerable populations through rural strategies with support from Ministry of Health, OHRDP and local partnerships. We remain optimistic for continued growth and success in 2017.

Original Signed By

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Huron County Health Unit

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