

PEER DELIVERED NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMMES (NSP) IN THE UNITED KINGDOM (UK): HARM REDUCTION INTERVENTIONS TO UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.

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Background:

The Hepatitis C Trust (HCT) is a peer-led UK NGO with a well-established peer model designed to support the ongoing UK hepatitis C elimination strategy, and to address unmet needs. In 2012, the UK's 'Full Recovery First' drug policy prioritized abstinence over harm reduction, weakening national oversight, with service delivery further compounded by COVID-19. Peer-reported anecdotal evidence indicated many pharmacy-based NSP were being restricted or closed. In response HCT conducted a mapping exercise, confirming a significant decline in NSP services across England revealing unmet need.

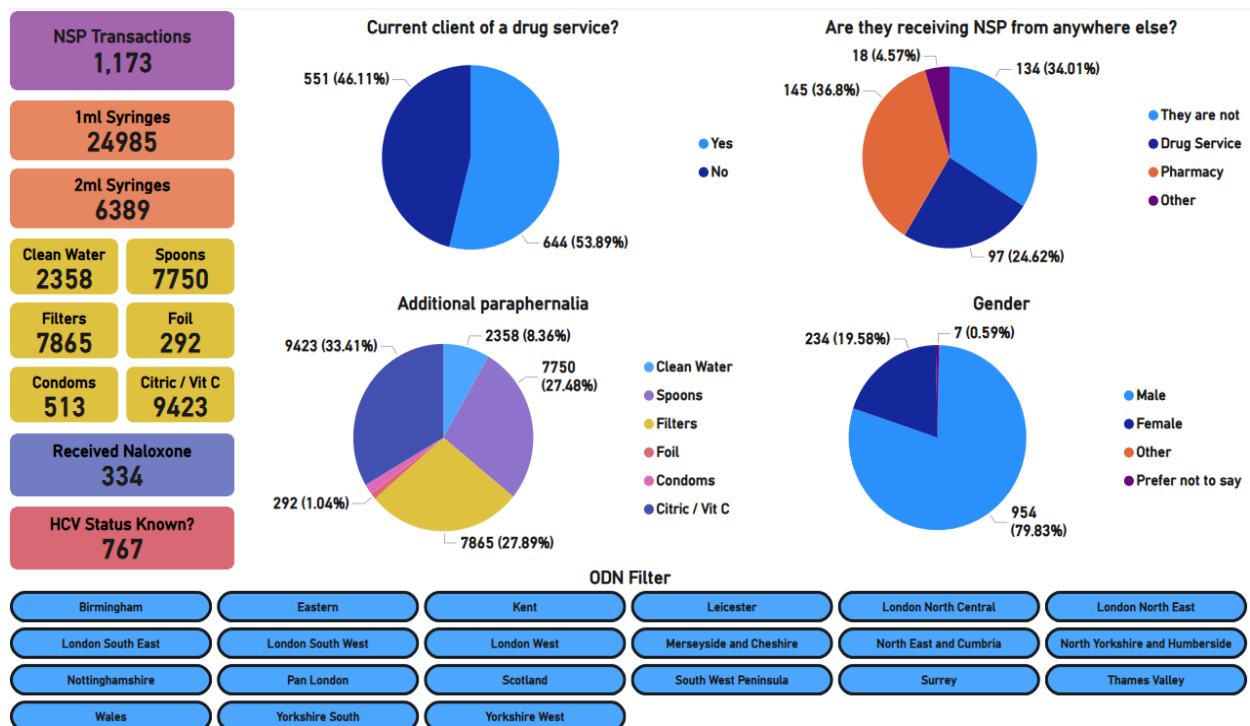
Description of model of care/intervention:

HCT developed an NSP outreach model whereby lived and living experienced peers would distribute injecting equipment alongside harm reduction guidance as part of outreach to people who use drugs (PWUD). In October 2024 two pilot sites were identified and agreements with UK drug service providers enabled access to equipment and Naloxone, and training provided to nine peers with lived and living experience of injecting drugs. The peers were provided with backpacks to carry NSP supply throughout their outreach activities. A new mobile application was developed for data upload and provided to peers.

Effectiveness:

By January 2025, 88 peers had completed accredited NSP training, 31,374 syringes and 334 Naloxone kits had been dispensed and the service expanded to 19 of the 23 NHSE regions in England. The service has been positively received, many reporting difficulty in accessing NSP elsewhere, relying on secondary distribution. Notably half of contacts weren't accessing drug treatment (See Fig 1)

Fig 1 NSP Dashboard



Conclusion and next steps:

Peer delivered NSP is an essential component in reducing drug related harms including BBV and wound site infections and has proved particularly successful in engaging those without access to services or pharmacy delivered NSP. The project is being expanded to all regions across the UK and peers will conduct surveys to further understand existing gaps in NSP as reported.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

HCT receive funding for community work from Gilead, Abbvie, MSD & NHS England.