

THE THISTLE- UK'S FIRST SANCTIONED DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOM

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Background

A pilot safer injecting facility was recommended as one of the responses to an outbreak of HIV in PWIDs in Glasgow in 2015. Following years of delay, a limited legal framework for such a service was finally agreed and The Thistle, the UK's first sanctioned safer drug consumption facility, became operational in Glasgow in January 2025.

Description of model of care/intervention/program

The Thistle is a modern, well resourced, psychologically informed environment staffed by a comprehensive multi-disciplinary team, delivered directly by statutory services. It aims to reduce drug related harms including response to overdoses, management of wounds and prevention, diagnosis and treatment of blood borne viruses. The service also aims to provide a hub for a severe and marginalised population to access others supports including self-care, housing, health care and drug treatment.

Effectiveness

In the first year, the 575 individuals (448 men, 127 women) registered to use the facility. The service was accessed 11,348 times with 7,827 of those visits being for use of injecting booths. Cocaine alone accounted for 81% of injecting episodes, heroin for 12% and heroin and cocaine (snowballing) for 7%. There were small number of injecting episodes linked to ketamine and methamphetamine. The staff responded to 93 medical emergencies, mostly associated with heroin use. All these overdoses were successfully managed, with only 15 requiring ambulance call out.

Conclusion and next steps

The first year of The Thistle demonstrates that despite the political and media debate and the very limited legal framework, there is a demand for a DCR in a UK setting and that this can be delivered safely and effectively. A full independent, academic led evaluation is underway. In the interim, the service continues to develop, priorities being improving access for women who remain under-represented and making a case for inhalation rooms within the facility. Learning is being shared with cities in Scotland considering similar facilities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

Nil.