

ASSOCIATION OF NURSES IN AIDS CARE

POSITION STATEMENT

Syringe Prescription for Injection Drug Users to Prevent Disease

Adopted by the ANAC Board of Directors, January 003
Reviewed and Revised by the ANAC Board: September 2007

Position:

It is the position of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care that:

- *Prescribing syringes to injection drug users can prevent blood borne diseases*
- *The benefits of syringe prescription include the ability to provide access to syringes in places where legal access is otherwise limited, the potential to improve medical care for an underserved population, and the possibility for health care providers to act as a conduit to drug treatment.*
- *States that do not allow prescription of syringes to injection drug users or possession of prescribed syringes should modify their laws to do so.*
- *Nursing and other medical education programs should teach their students about the health needs of injection drug users, including the need for access to sterile syringes.*
- *Syringe prescription should be part of a comprehensive approach to the issue of drug injection and disease that includes outreach, prevention and treatment.*

Statement of Concern:

The re-use and sharing of contaminated syringes and other injection equipment by injection drug users (IDUs) accounts for nearly one third of all HIV cases and one half of all hepatitis C cases in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [CDC], 2007). IDUs face many additional health problems from contaminated syringes, including abscesses, cellulitis, tetanus, wound botulism and endocarditis (CDC, 2002). Much of the re-use and sharing of syringes is caused by restricted legal access to sterile syringes (Physician prescription, N.D.). Thus, comprehensive efforts to improve access to sterile syringes for injection drug users who cannot or will not stop injecting are needed.

Background:

Needle exchange programs, while effective in reducing risk behavior and HIV infection, have been hampered by a lack of funding, lack of local and federal support, and limited operating hours and locations. Pharmacy sales of syringes are another important approach to providing sterile syringes, but many states still have laws restricting the purchase and possession of syringes (Abramson, 2000).

Nurses play a critical role in helping to identify patients who would benefit from syringe prescription. Prescribing syringes to active injection drug users can reduce risk for HIV infection and promote linkage to comprehensive medical, social and drug treatment services.

References:

Abramson, D. (2000). Federal law and syringe prescription and dispensing. Available at www.temple.edu/lawschool/aidspolicy/default.htm accessed October 26, 2006.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2007). *A comprehensive approach: prevention blood-borne infections among injection drug users*. Available at www.cdc.gov/idu/pubs/ca/toc.htm accessed October 26, 2006.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2002, February). Physician prescription of sterile syringes to injection drug users. *IDU/HIV Prevention*. Available at www.cdc.gov/idu/facts/physician.htm accessed October 26, 2006.

Physician prescription of sterile syringes for injection drug users can have important benefits. (n.d.). Available at www.massmed.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=6217&TEMPLATE=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm accessed October 26, 2006.

Rich, J.D., Macalino, G.E., McKenzie, M., & Burris, S. (2001). Syringe prescription to prevent HIV infection in Rhode Island: A case study. *American Journal of Public Health, 91*(5), 1-2.