

# AIDS PREVENTION – A Role for Community Pharmacists

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'Problems associated with Drug Abuse' clearly fall within the advisory role, which pharmacists should recognize as their present and future area of special responsibility<sup>(1)</sup>. AIDS is now a pandemic disease and is spreading at an alarming rate among IV drug abusers in many European countries and in the U.S.A. The sharing of syringes and needles contribute significantly to its spread but this may be limited if community pharmacists supply syringes and needles to drug abusers.

### Aims

A survey was carried out in community pharmacies as part of the dissertation for the B.Pharm. degree entitled "The Role of the Pharmacist in Drug Abuse Prevention".

A section of the survey concerned the supply of disposable syringes to drug abusers and in what way pharmacists can contribute to prevent drug abuse and the spreading of AIDS.

### Method

The survey was carried out on 138 Maltese Community Pharmacies. A questionnaire to analyse the community pharmacists' view on the problem was handed personally to each pharmacist. 61% of the pharmacists filled and returned the questionnaire.

### Results and Discussion

Evidence exist that needle sharing is a route for transmission of AIDS virus among I-V drug abusers and that needle scarcity promotes needle-sharing behaviour.

The use of syringes creates debate among pharmacists. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of clients buying syringes from pharmacies. Relatively, there are only 11% who have no young people visiting their pharmacies for syringes compared with the 60% who have.

Table 2 indicates the views of pharmacists about supplying syringes to drug addicts.

The majority of pharmacists (76%) have responded positively as to whether syringes should be supplied to drug addicts to prevent the spreading of AIDS and Hepatitis B viruses.

Table 1: the % of clients buying syringes from pharmacies.

Patients	No.	%
diabetic patients	40	43.5
many young people suspected as drug addicts	23	25.0
only a few young people	33	35.8
no young people	10	10.9

Table 2: The view of pharmacists on supplying syringes to drug addicts.

Statement	No.	%
Do not agree	15	16.3
agree	70	76.0
give, not to cause trouble	1	1.0
makes no difference	6	6.5

These pharmacists understand that not giving syringes will not hinder abusers from using the drugs.

### Conclusion

Pharmacists have a role to play in minimising the risk of AIDS in drug abusers by providing syringes/needles and arrange for the safe disposal of used equipment. However built into this role, must be an effort to educate those people on the transmission on AIDS in addition to helping them give up drugs altogether. Dr. M. Sciberras in the October issue of "The Pharmacist" stated that no IV drug abusers attending the Detoxification Centre at St. Luke's Hospital or Caritas Rehabilitation Centre have been reported to be HIV sero-positive but measures must be taken beforehand for its prevention.

76% of the pharmacists agree to give syringes to drug addicts. It would be interesting to see how many would volunteer to take part in a needle exchange scheme.

1 Maddock, D.M., Drug Abuse, A Guide to Pharmacists. The Pharmaceutical Press, London, 1987.  
 2 Valentino, M.L. (1989). The Role of the Pharmacist in Drug Abuse Prevention. University of Malta, 1989.