

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED: REFLECTING ON PATTERNS OF USE AND SERVICE PROVISION AT THE SYDNEY MEDICALLY SUPERVISED INJECTING CENTRE 2001-2015

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Introduction and Aims: The Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre (MSIC) is a harm reduction service where clients inject drugs under supervision. Staff engage a marginalized population of people who inject drugs (PWID), offering advice to reduce harm, referrals, and overdose management. MSIC collects socio-demographic data at registration and routinely collects drug type injected at each visit. MSIC is uniquely placed to provide real time drug trend data and respond to changes in client profile and needs.

Design and Methods: Sample of 14,870 registered clients, 2001-2015. Key indicators were analyzed.

Results: In 14 years of operation there have been 915,504 drug injections by approximately 14,500 individuals. Of these injections: 73% by men; 59% by those aged >35 years; 38% were heroin, 41% were other opioids, 10% cocaine and 6% meth/amphetamines. Approximately 5,550 opioid overdoses were managed (7 per 1,000 opioid injections).

Monthly visits range from 706 in the early months of operation to 7,723 in late 2003, average of 5,563. Number of visits fluctuated over the 14 years, with no clear seasonal trends.

Registrations to the service have remained stable over time, approximately 7-10 per week. Gender ratios have remained stable, 75% male. The number of indigenous clients visiting has remained stable (11%) but high compared to the overall population.

There is evidence of an ageing cohort among frequent attenders. The proportion of new clients reporting homelessness has increased over time.

Patterns of drug use falls into three distinct eras –five years of mostly heroin; then five years of both heroin and pharmaceutical opioids; then four years of predominant pharmaceutical opioids. MSIC appears to be on the cusp of a new era due to changes in availability and formulation of pharmaceutical opioids in Australia.

Discussion and Conclusions: If clients change, so must we. This paper shows significant changes in demographics, behaviour and circumstances for MSIC clients and will explore responses at the coal face.

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