

DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS AND PEER INVOLVEMENT: EXPERIENCES FROM LISBON

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Background

Peer involvement in the context of HIV and viral hepatitis services has proved to be effective in creating trusted environments, enhancing engagement and generating positive health and social outcomes. Considerable less is known on peer-led activities and models to implement it in the context of drug consumption rooms.

Description of intervention

The Mobile Drug Consumption Room (MDCR) opened in 2019 as the first sanctioned safer space in Portugal, and from the beginning peers were employed as full-time staff. However, this model was not sufficient to ensure a meaningful participation of clients. To promote community self-organization, a peer programme was developed in partnership with a community-led organization. The programme included small payments (by hour or task), and a group of peers had the chance to define working methodologies, goals and activities, supported by two facilitators from the community. Additionally, peers could participate in outreach activities of the MDCR.

Effectiveness

The peer programme started with one group of 10 peers and had 8 meetings between July and December 2020. Those meetings included peer training, building of an activist agenda and campaigns, revision of information materials and study visits. A group only for women started in November 2020 by the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This group is still running, but became autonomous in its activities (described elsewhere). The most regular activity has been the outreach work in open drug scenes, which helped to improve informal consumption spaces by reducing discarded syringes, and contributed for the positive acceptance of the MDCR in the neighborhoods.

Conclusion and next steps

Peer involvement is a process that takes significant time and effort. There is no unique model to implement it, and several approaches have to be tried. Next steps include replication of similar peer programmes in other harm reduction services in Lisbon.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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