EDUCATION TO REDUCE HIV/HBV/HCV TRANSMISSION IN INCARCERATED POPULATIONS

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Background: The US incarcerates more citizens than any other country and nearly half of the prison population has drug-related convictions. HCV rates are twenty times higher in prison and HIV rates are five times higher than the non-incarcerated population. Over 90% of those impacted by hepatitis C will pass through a correctional setting each year. In order to make meaningful progress eradicating viral hepatitis, programs must expand to address the health of incarcerated citizens in the US.

Description of model of care/intervention: The Hepatitis Education Project (HEP) has provided education in Washington State Prisons for nearly twenty years. HEP visits each prison and conducts a two-hour course reviewing the prevalence of HIV/viral hepatitis, basics of immune/liver function, overview of viruses and vaccines, harm reduction principals, overdose response, viral hepatitis treatment options, and ways to protect one's health. HEP also conducts an intensive PEER educator training four times a year to spread awareness of harm reduction practices when using drugs, engaging in sexual intercourse, and tattooing.

Effectiveness: Over 17,000 students have taken the basics course and over 150 students have taken the in-depth course. Students report an increased desire to use harm reduction methods when engaging in risky behaviors, have spread knowledge through informal social networks, and have advocated for program expansion within the prison system.

Conclusion and next steps: HEP has run an effective educational program to reduce the spread of infectious diseases among the population most impacted by viral hepatitis in the US. HEP continues to expand its program, has begun working on a video to be shown to all new prison residents, has adapted its model for delivering education to include incarcerated teachers, and has expanded to other justice-involved sites in its geographical area.

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