

Episode 1- The Van Goes Out [MUSIC PLAYING]

Hi, guys. My name is Angel Ojeda, and I'm the Medical Research Assistant for the Community Health Care Van here in New Haven, Connecticut.

In this following animation, I'm going to show you the process of a needle exchange and how it's done on the syringe service unit. The syringe service unit makes it very accessible for clients to get clean syringes, clean tools, and it helps us decrease the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other viruses. Thank you for watching.

Hi, it's me again. Let's discuss the needle exchange on the syringe service van. The Syringe Services Programs use a white unmarked minivan to go out into the community. Usually between 9 AM and 3 PM every day. Making between three to five stops in high risk areas. Clients can find out about the locations and the schedule from the flyers or cards. But most hear about the schedule by word of mouth. The van stays for about three hours in any one location.

There are a minimum of two staff members on the van. One staff member records the client's identifier information and logs the number of syringes coming in and going out. Along with other items that might be given, such as personal hygiene kits, alcohol wipes, sterile water, cotton pellets, cookers, gauze, band aids, Narcan kits, fentanyl test strips, condoms, wound care kits, and sharp containers. There are also two needle sizes offered, 1 ml and 0.5 ml.

Sometimes, Syringe Services Programs receive donations like clothing, for example, PPE and mask that can also be distributed to clients, with some programs doing home deliveries. Especially now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, home delivery has become so important to ensure that those high-risk clients have access to supplies and stay healthy.

In Connecticut, there are Syringe Services Programs in the Fairfield, New Haven, New London, Windham, and Hartford counties. With clients coming from other parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts. The programs can see between 60 to 120 clients per day at each location in the city they serve. This number usually increases during summer months.

The second staff member on the minivan is doing the actual needle exchange, as well as giving out the prevention kits. The client puts used syringes into a bucket, and the staff moves them into a larger collection container. Clients often receive 5 to 10 syringes more than they bring in, while some programs have no limit, and give out as many as the client needs. Most limit the distribution to about 200 syringes per individual.

Used needles are collected in a sharps container. When the container is full, it is sealed, placed in a biohazard bag, which is then put in a biohazard box to be closed and secured with tape. The staff member then marks it incinerate only.

Every client that comes up to the minivan for the first time, needs to fill out an intake form that collects first name, last name, birthday, gender, sex they identify with, race, and ethnicity. We also ask for their address. But if the clients are not comfortable providing this information, we

ask for a zip code or the city that they live in. Using this information, clients are assigned a special code unique to them. The clients then use this code when they return to the van.

Some Syringe Services Programs use identification cards, in addition to, or instead of the code. Identification cards have expiration dates on them. They usually expire every six months, so the clients need to update them to access van services. The card renewal is also used to keep the testing current.

Finally, the identification card can serve as a proof of participation in the needle exchange program. These can help when the client is stopped by a police officer, who may be concerned about someone carrying syringes.

I hope you enjoy learning about the process of the needle exchange on the mobile van. In the next episode, we will discuss the harm reduction model according to which Syringe Services Programs operate. Thank you for watching and see you soon.

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