

# Buprenorphine as HIV Prevention in NSPs

Jason Farrell  
Harm Reduction Consulting Services

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# Overview of Intervention

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- Positive Health Project, Inc (PHP), the most comprehensive syringe exchange/harm reduction program in New York City introduced a ground-breaking evidenced based behavioral intervention intended to reduce the transmission of HIV, HCV, substance use and criminal recidivism in New York City.
- The intervention was uniquely designed to serve drug injectors who presented themselves while experiencing drug withdrawal and desperation when exchanging syringes.
- The intervention included Buprenorphine (BUP/NX) induction, stabilization, medical care, HIV/HCV counseling and testing and referral to continued BUP/NX maintenance treatment.

# Goals of Intervention

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- To prevent high risk injection behaviours among drug injectors while experiencing withdrawal symptoms.
- To offer drug injectors a daily reprieve from injecting drugs, whereby providing an opportunity to contemplate BUP/NX treatment and to use limited funds for food and/or housing
- To provide informal low threshold entry to drug treatment without binding contracts or urine testing requirements

# Intervention Setting

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- Positive Health Project, Inc. (PHP) was founded in 1993
- Primary mission is to reduce HIV/HCV infection among IDU's and substance users by providing a range of health, education and prevention services.
- Services were provided based upon clients needs, trends in drug use risk behaviours, and upon client advisory committee recommendations.
- Pioneered the one-stop-shop harm reduction model

# Intervention Setting

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- 1999: Designed HBV vaccination study for IDU's with Don Des Jarlais.
- 2001: Developed safe injection equipment and efficacy study with Yale School of Public Health.
- 2002: Opened first state licensed medical/dental center for IDU's co-located in a needle exchange program.
- 2003: Free HIV/HCV Testing and Hepatitis A & B vaccination program.

# Buprenorphine in the U.S.

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- In October 2002 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Buprenorphine (BPN) as a controlled Schedule III drug for the treatment of opiate dependence.
- Buprenorphine became available as a prescription medication under the brand names of Subutex and Suboxone, both of which are taken sublingually (under the tongue).
- Buprenorphine in combination with Nalaxone (BUP/NX) is commonly prescribed in the United States in efforts to minimize diversion for illicit use.
- Compared with methadone, BUP/NX has a relatively lower risk of abuse, dependence and side effects, and has a longer duration of action.
- Because of BPN's ceiling effect, an overdose is less likely to occur than with methadone or with other opiates.

# Unique Prescribing Options

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- Physicians who successfully undergo mandatory federal training are permitted to prescribe BUP/NX to treat heroin and/or other forms of opiate dependence in their private offices, in clinics, and in traditional drug treatment programs.
- Because the induction of BUP/NX requires the patient to be in withdrawal, our experience showed that asking patients to voluntarily force themselves into withdrawal was less likely to occur than the likelihood of recruiting injectors when they present themselves experiencing withdrawal symptoms during syringe exchange transactions.

# Intervention Delivery

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- When injectors present themselves during a syringe exchange transaction, a staff member would ask if he/she is experiencing withdrawal symptoms.
- If the injector is experiencing withdrawal symptoms they were informed of option to receive syringes or a BUP/NX tablet and that in 20 minutes they would feel better, not needing to inject.
- If the injector expresses an interest he/she was then sent to medical staff for an assessment for induction.
- Upon satisfactorily completing the assessment, the injector would be given a BUP/NX tablet and asked to remain in office until medication takes effect and to determine dosing needs.



# Intervention Delivery

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- Upon completing the induction process, observation and potential dosing adjustment, the individual will be informed of option to return the next day for another tablet.
- Upon returning next day the injector will be re-assessed and given another BUP/NX tablet.
- After one week of returning, the injector will be offered an opportunity to enter into a one week BUP/NX treatment agreement offering one week of medication and instructions to return twice during the week for one monitoring appointment and for a final meeting to assess and determine interest in maintenance treatment.

# Buprenorphine in NSPs in NYC

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- In 2004 the NYC Department of Health and Mental Health services promoted prescribing Buprenorphine in other settings
- NSPs connected to physicians authorised to prescribe started to offer BUP/NX to injectors.
- Having physicians capable to prescribe BUP at NSPs offered heroin injectors treatment who were otherwise unable or unlikely to access OST and/or BUP via traditional settings
- The Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) launched a BUP access initiative with a physician rotating among NSPs on a weekly basis prescribing BUP/NX.

# Preliminary BUP Studies

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- The Harm Reduction Coalition Buprenorphine Maintenance Harm Reduction Program conducted a pilot study from November 2005 to July 2008 (32 months) enrolling 100 participants. Participants were recruited by SEP workers or friends.
- Patients retained in the study at the end of 3, 6, 9 and 12 months were 68%, 63%, 56%, and 42% respectively. Median duration of treatment was 3 months
- Therapeutic outcomes were comparable with patients who selected office based treatment and who were treated in OST programs

# Lessons Learned

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- Despite unique design of the intervention few participated
- 85 – 90% of syringe program participants were enrolled in OST services creating barriers
- OST providers were not compliant with patients requests to adjust methadone doses to safely transfer to BUP/NX
- Many who were experiencing withdrawal also misused benzodiazepines excluding them from BPN induction
- Due to recent roll out of BUP/NX in NYC many were reluctant to start treatment and there was a limited number of eligible physicians to prescribe

# Resources and Contact Details

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- Jason Farrell – [jason@hrcsny.com](mailto:jason@hrcsny.com)
- Dr. R. Douglas Bruce – [robert.bruce@yale.edu](mailto:robert.bruce@yale.edu)
- Dr. Sharon Stancliff – [stancliff@harmreduction.org](mailto:stancliff@harmreduction.org)
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Merci  
Thank you  
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