Motivations for and perspectives of medication diversion among clients of a safer opioid supply program in Toronto, Canada

What we did

- Taking a look at a Safer Opioid Supply (SOS) program in Toronto, ON. We interviewed 25 program clients.
- Program eligibility was daily or near-daily use of unregulated opioids.
- SOS provides hydromorphone alongside traditional OAT medications such as methadone or Kadian.
- Clients also get case management, counseling, harm reduction services, and connection to other services.

Here are the major themes...

1. Compassionate Sharing

- Sharing medication with friends they saw in withdrawal.
- No medication was shared with opioid naïve individuals.
- “Just a friendly thing, it wasn’t like a transaction or anything”.

2. Sharing or Selling due to Unmet Needs

- Diverting medication to meet basic needs such as food, shelter etc. Without engaging in other criminalized activities.
- Initial dose of SOS did not meet needs and they needed additional drugs of higher potency.

3. Demand for Safer Alternatives in the Unregulated Drug Market

- SOS medication ending up in the unregulated drug market is a safer alternative than other opioids as it has a known amount and potency. Many people experience harms due to the unknowns in the supply.

4. Price of SOS Medications in the Unregulated Market as Diversion Deterrent

- Oversaturation of hydromorphone in the unregulated market, makes the price drop, in turn making it less 'attractive' to divert in the first place.

5. Coerced Diversion

- Participants spoke about the potential for harassment, violence and exploitation they faced due to the perceived value and demand for their SOS medications.

What we learned

- Motivations for diversion were often an act of mutual support, care and trying to meet basic unmet needs.
- We need to address structural inequalities that most impact people who use drugs.

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