

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THREE HYPOTHETICAL MODELS OF DRUG CHECKING SERVICE DELIVERY IN A SCOTTISH CONTEXT

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Background:

Scotland is experiencing a public health crisis in relation to drug related deaths. Drug checking allows people to have their drugs tested, providing harm reduction support and advice. There are currently no drug checking services in Scotland. This research explored the suitability of different models of drug checking in a Scottish context.

Methods:

Forty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders across three Scottish cities. Stakeholders comprised of: people who use(d) drugs (PWUD); family members of PWUD; and professional stakeholders (NHS, third sector and police). Participants explored three hypothetical models of drug checking in a Scottish context. 'Model one' was a third sector fixed-site service, with a mobile van travelling to different locations; 'Model two' was a drug checking service in an NHS substance use service; and 'Model three' a drug checking service in a pharmacy.

Results:

The third sector model was most popular, with participants highlighting the trust which PWUD often have with such services. A mobile drug checking van was seen as a means of reaching people who may not access fixed-site services. However, participants acknowledged complex legal issues around mobile drug checking. The pharmacy model was popular due to pre-existing footfall at pharmacies amongst PWUD accessing other harm reduction services. However, participants noted challenges in relation to the layout of pharmacies, and its suitability for drug checking. The NHS based model was least popular, with participants highlighting the mistrust which PWUD often feel towards statutory services. However, participants discussed the specialist staff, links with key services and rigorous protocols of NHS services as potential resources which could be drawn on to develop a mixed model of provision.

Conclusion:

This research addresses the knowledge-gap in relation to different models of drug checking and their suitability to different cultural, legal and drug market contexts. It explored potential models of service delivery for Scotland.

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