

The Arud Peer Project, established in 2017, aimed to enhance hepatitis C care for substance users. The project recruited former hepatitis C patients with personal experience with substances, who proved effective in counseling substance users and persuading them to enter therapy. To further leverage the trust substance users have in peers, the project expanded to include support in dental health, gynecology, and sexual health.

In the realm of dental health, peers conducted a study throughout the year, interviewing substance users at various facilities in Zurich. Participants received a tooth-cleaning set with dental care gum and dental floss sticks, as well as information on accessing medical care for dental problems.



While our study is ongoing, an initial evaluation indicates that the issue is complex and the study may not be able to clarify all open questions or provide meaningful statistics. It's often challenging to engage substance users in a study, especially if they are currently seeking a substance. Our survey includes only six questions, which already pose a challenge for many respondents. Questions about feelings of shame related to dental health are particularly difficult to answer as responses can vary greatly depending on who is asking and the respondent's current state of mind.

Despite these challenges, we conducted many individual conversations with those affected during our survey and obtained interesting findings:

Many cocaine users have had negative experiences with local anesthesia for dental treatment due to the reduced effect of anesthesia caused by cocaine use. This often leads dentists to incorrectly dose the amount of anesthetic, resulting in too little or too much effect. We are working with experts to create a leaflet for dentists and affected persons to address this issue.

Even in affluent Switzerland, funding for complex dental treatment is often lacking. For instance, we encountered a thirty-year-old patient who had three front teeth broken off in an accident at a psychiatric facility. Neither invalids nor accident insurance nor the social welfare office were willing to cover the full cost of a reasonable dental prosthesis. The patient was only offered extraction of the tooth stumps and fabrication of a partial denture - an inadequate treatment for a young person.

Substance users often prioritize spending money on drugs over dental care. Regular dental visits and adequate caries prevention are especially important for young addicts. Better support is needed to prevent future dental damage. Ensuring dental health should always be part of Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT).

In our next project, we would like to conduct a similar survey through female peers in the area of gynecology and sexual health and find out how to improve health among female substance users in this area.

Vist our website

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