



Quality and Performance Measures (QPM) Team

Meeting Notes May 19, 2021

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Meeting Notes

Participants: Christina Del Vecchio, Daniel Davidson, Nilda Fernandez, Linda Ferraro, Shannon Francis, Tawana Guadarrama, Daniel Hulton, Doug Janssen, Clunie Jean-Baptiste, Will Kenny, Dionne Kotey, Heather Linardos, Kiana McDavid, Myrna Millet-Saez, Erika Mott, Consuelo Muñoz, Mitchell Namias, Iris Ortiz, Luje Pierre Louis, Jackie Robertson, Joselyn Rodriguez, Ramón Rodriguez-Santana, Tajae Sergeant, Bob Sideleau, Sue Speers, Jen Vargas, Melinda Vazquez-Yopp

Facilitator: Susan Major

Recorder: Dave Bechtel

Meeting Accomplishments

The team accomplished the following tasks:

- Identified potential speakers for a **Quality Webinar** scheduled for fall 2021.
- Reviewed and discussed the 2020 **Syringe Services Program (SSP)** data – including the 30%+ increases in the number of clients, and number of syringes distributed and collected.

Identified Tasks

- All QPM members are encouraged to **share suggestions for quality improvement projects to features at the Quality Webinar** with [Dave](#) and [Peta-Gaye](#). Priority topics include: Improving PrEP use among Black men and women; Decreasing the incidence of STIs particularly among young people; and Re-engaging PLWH in care including strategies to engage PLWH during the pandemic.
 - QPM staff will reach out to Luje Pierre Louis and Bob Sideleau to discuss potential keynote speakers for the Quality Webinar.
 - Ramón Rodriguez-Santana will share additional data on the housing status of SSP clients.
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Welcome and Introductions

DPH liaison Sue Major welcomed everyone to the Quality and Performance Measures (QPM) Team at 11:03 am. QPM reviews and discusses data, develops indicators to track our progress in HIV prevention and care, and helps improve the quality of HIV prevention and care. Ms. Major noted changes in the agenda: DAC co-chair Peta-Gaye Nembhard could not attend the meeting, so former co-chair Nilda Fernandez agreed to help facilitate the meeting; and the out-of-care presentation was postponed, so Ramón Rodriguez-Santana agreed to present on the 2020 Syringe Services Program (SSP) data.

Participants introduced themselves and approved the April QPM meeting notes by consensus.



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Update from April Meeting

Dave Bechtel provided a brief update on planning for the fall 2021 Quality Webinar (see Handout 1 on page 6 for details). Participants shared the following suggestions:

- Doug Janssen suggested inviting **Deidre McDaniel** as a keynote speaker, and Tajae Sergeon agreed. Ms. McDaniel presented to the CHPC this morning on health inequity. Bob Sideleau noted that AETC (AIDS Education and Training Center) may be able to sponsor Ms. McDaniel.
- Luje Pierre Louis stated that the Bridgeport City Councilman (potential speaker) would be willing to share his story at the webinar.

Dave will follow up with Mr. Sideleau and Mr. Pierre Louis, and encouraged participants to share additional suggestions for presenters and quality improvement projects to showcase.

Syringe Services Program (SSP) Presentation

Ms. Major introduced Ramón Rodríguez-Santana and thanked him for agreeing to “save the day” and present at the meeting. Participants first were asked to estimate the number of SSP clients for 2020, knowing that 4,428 clients were served in 2019 and considering the COVID-19 pandemic as context for 2020. Most participants estimated that SSP served between 4,000 and 5,000 clients:

- Less than 4,000 (9%)
- Between 4,000 and 4,500 (26%)
- Between 4,500 and 5,000 (26%)
- Between 5,000 and 5,500 (17%)
- Over 5,500 (22%) [*this was the correct answer: see below*]

Mr. Rodríguez-Santana dedicated his presentation to Pamela Foster, who passed away in April. Ms. Foster introduced Ramón to the Syringe Services Program when he joined DPH (Connecticut Department of Public Health), and worked with him to collect client-level data (vs. aggregate data) on the program.

Mr. Rodríguez-Santana presented 2020 SSP data, as well as trends from 2012 through 2020 (see presentation for details). Themes from the presentation included:

- SSP served **5,794 clients** in 2020, a 31% increase over 2019. In 2020, 70% were new clients, 70% identified as male, the majority identified as White (44%) or Hispanic/Latino (37%), and the median age was 41. The zip code with the largest number of clients (2,542) was in Hartford.
- 321 clients (5.5%) reported that they were diagnosed with Hepatitis C, and 51 (0.9%) reported that they were living with HIV.
- 20% of clients were tested for HIV and Hepatitis C. This may seem low, but clients may also be getting tested as part of their primary care.
- The majority of clients reported that their primary substance used was heroin, with the vast majority injecting heroin.



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- 3,123 clients were trained in overdose (OD) prevention, and a total of 3,292 OD prevention kits (with Naloxone) were distributed in 2020. Clients reported **395 OD reversals**. The number of kits and OD reversals increased substantially compared with recent years (e.g., 1,301 kits in 2016).
- A total of 7,601 Fentanyl Test Strips and 11,048 Crack Kits were distributed to clients in 2020.
- In 2020, **1,587,201 syringes were dispensed and 1,026,115 syringes were collected**, an increase of 39% and 36% respectively compared with 2019.
- The number of new HIV diagnoses among PWID (people who inject drugs) has continued to remain low in recent years, with only 14 diagnoses in 2019.
- In 2021, DPH will be collecting additional information on secondary distribution of syringes, the crack smoking population, and SSP participation among sex workers.

Questions and Discussion. Themes from the discussion included:

- **2020 increase.** Nilda Fernandez asked about the 30%+ increase in the number of clients and number of syringes dispensed and distributed. Mr. Rodriguez-Santana stated that the pandemic may have increased the mental health challenges and suffering of people with substance use disorder. The busiest SSPs reported more consumption of drugs in 2020. The number of overdoses also increased in 2020. Mr. Janssen noted how challenging it would be to deal with addiction on top of all the stress and mental health challenges with the pandemic.
- **Fentanyl.** Mr. Rodriguez-Santana stated that fentanyl is cheaper to produce than heroin, and has been used by some to replace heroin. The Fentanyl Testing Strips that are distributed can check the presence of fentanyl. If it's detected, people can make sure they have Naloxone on hand (if they choose to use drugs that contain fentanyl).
- **Naloxone.** Iris Ortiz asked how easy was it for people to access Naloxone? Mr. Rodriguez-Santana replied that people can obtain Naloxone through the SSPs, but that the person needed to be with someone else to use it (i.e., peer or partner to reverse the overdose). SSPs train people on how to use Naloxone and PWID have been resourceful in making sure it is available. For example, on Park Street, there is a person who has Naloxone. People know to run to him if someone is overdosing.

Bob Sideleau noted the importance of peer support. In his work at a detox unit, they educate clients on using with peers, and that even after administering Naloxone, it's important to go to the hospital because it can wear off after 20 minutes. The program sends everyone home with Naloxone. Even if the person is no longer using drugs, they can have it on hand to help others.

Mr. Rodriguez-Santana reported how he has worked with local stores as well. A bodega near DPH now have Naloxone kits, and customers know to run to the bodega if a person is overdosing. The owner called Ramón twice to let him know that the kits had saved people's lives. At a local Dunkin Donuts, some people use drugs in their bathrooms – so the local SSP trained staff in using Naloxone.



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- **Housing.** Will Kenny asked if there is data on unhoused SSP clients and clients who experienced housing insecurity during COVID? Mr. Rodriguez-Santana reported that this data is available. He will analyze the data and share it with the team.
- **SSP Clients vs. Population.** Dave asked if SSP clients reflected the population of PWID? Mr. Rodriguez-Santana reported that Connecticut estimates that there are between 6,000 and 12,000 PWID, although the number of people who use heroin (and are at risk for OD even if they do not inject) is higher than this. SSP closely reflect the overall demographics of PWID.
- **COVID Response.** Ms. Major noted that SSPs have stepped up during the pandemic – expanding services to provide food and help clients with housing. Mr. Rodriguez-Santana agreed. SSPs delivered new services during COVID – using assembly lines to create sandwiches and distributing masks. Ms. Fernandez agreed – SSP workers rock!
- **Implications.** Mitch Namias thanked Ramón for the presentation; this is his favorite presentation of the year. While Mr. Namias is pleased that the number of syringes dispensed is increasing, it's also concerning that there has been such a large increase in the number of new clients in 2020. What other partners do we need to engage to address the increase in drug use? Mr. Rodriguez-Santana stated that there has traditionally been much stigma about going to an SSP. Two SSPs worked with clients who requested home deliveries and the ability to do secondary distribution of syringes. They started home deliveries in suburban and rural areas; this will continue after COVID. Mr. Sideleau noted that this is an evolving story; people are accessing resources during the pandemic in different ways. Ms. Fernandez noted that this was similar to the increase in alcohol use during the pandemic. Mr. Rodriguez-Santana stated that programs do not judge people about their use, which can have many causes (e.g., genetics, trauma / mental health, ease of access).
- **HIV Testing.** Ms. Major reported that SSPs are piloting a 1-minute HIV test. The current rapid tests take 20 minutes, and many clients may not want to wait that long. The new tests may result in an increase in testing rates at sites.
- **Sharing SSP Data.** Mr. Kenny asked if this data shared with people volunteering and doing this work? Mr. Rodriguez-Santana replied that it has been, and that he'd be happy to share the information with other groups.

Ms. Major thanked the SSPs – including attendee Shannon Francis from Greater Hartford Harm Reduction Coalition – for their great work.

Meeting Feedback

Ms. Major asked participants to share feedback on the meeting via the chat. Comments included:

- Linda Ferraro: Great presentation Ramon! Excellent information shared from an expert!
- Nilda Fernandez: Great presentation Ramon! Great meeting space, great presentation, questions and answers! Dave and Sue, you both did great facilitating the QPM!
- Will Kenny: This was awesome! Thank you.
- Consuelo Munoz: Thanks Ramon.



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- Doug Janssen: Thank you for your work and this presentation Ramon. So much great info shared today.
- Robert Sideleau: Great information!
- Tajae Sergeon: I learned a few new things. This was great!
- Dionne Kotey: Very informative.
- Joselyn Rodriguez: I pretty much enjoy great presentations like this one that allow us to learn and understand certain subjects where misinformation usually present - good job Ramon.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm.

##End QPM Notes##



Handout 1: Quality Webinar Update

Potential Dates:

September 15, 2021 or October 20, 2021 [third Wednesday]

9:30 am to Noon

Priority Topics:

- Improving PrEP use among Black men and women (53%)
- Decreasing the incidence of STIs particularly among young people (53%)
- Re-engaging PLWH in care (53%)
- Strategies to engage PLWH during COVID, address needs like housing (40%)
- Assessing stigma (27%)

Potential Activities:

- **Keynote Speaker(s).** Could include PLWH sharing their story that relates to the key topics, speaker on quality improvement during COVID, or speaker on other priority topics.
- **Full-group presentations on QI projects / priority topics.**
- **Breakout Rooms.** Use breakout rooms for brief presentations on topics.
- **Fun / engaging activities or music during breaks.**

Potential Presenters:

- **PrEP.** Chat for Change initiative (presented on early implementation at January QPM meeting).
- **STIs.** Ryan White providers and Part C providers who conducted QI projects on improving STI screening.
- **Re-engaging in Care.** ACT project on re-engagement.
- **Stigma.** CCMC / UConn Health pilot-test of the HIV Stigma Scale.
- **Keynote.** Bridgeport City Councilman describing his journey from homelessness to city council, Center for Quality Improvement and Innovation on quality improvement during COVID.