

SOWING CHANGE TO HARVEST JUSTICE

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# Harm Reduction in Prison: A 13-Year Experience

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# Introduction

Today, I would like to share my experience with harm reduction inside prisons.

As you know, harm reduction is essential to save lives,

to protect health,

and to respect human dignity.

However, working on harm reduction in



prison is not easy.





# The Law vs. The Reality

First of all, in my country, the law officially allows harm reduction programs in prison.

Programs like needle exchange, opioid substitution therapy, and health education are legally possible.

But in reality, the prison administration often refuses to implement them.

They are afraid.

They prioritize security instead of health.

They fear that harm reduction could encourage drug use, decrease control inside the prison, or to use as weapon

At the same time, many healthcare workers are also afraid.

Some fear losing their jobs.

Some fear conflicts with prison management.

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Some fear being seen as "too close" to people living in prison (PLP).







# Why It Is Essential

In prisons, health risks are extremely high, and include:

HIV

Hepatitis

Overdose

Violence

Without harm reduction, these risks are much higher.

Without harm reduction, people die.

But harm reduction is not only about health.

It is also about human rights.

Every person in prison still has the right to health, to dignity, and to life.

And as healthcare workers, it is our responsibility to defend these rights – even when the context is hostile.





# VLM health unit



VLM health unit is a Unit of University Hospital Centre of Montpellier; and the health of PLPs is under the responsibility of the MoH

Villeneuve-Lès-Maguelone prison:

- Remand prison
- **1050 inmates** for 600 places
- High turnover
- Approximately 200 visits per day to the health unit
- Multi-professional team: general practitioner, psychiatrist, dentist, pharmacist, nurse, psychologist, pharmacy technician, radio technician, secretary, health manager, etc.



Prison of
Villeneuve les Maguelone
Montpellier
South France







## VLM health unit



In my case, I have been practicing harm reduction in prisons for more than 13 years now.

From the beginning (and until now), I faced strong resistance from the administration.

They told me, "You are crazy."
They said, "You are putting the prison at risk."

But I refused to stop.

I continued, because:

I saw the real needs of the PLP.

harm reduction is not only legal – it is a right.





## VLM health unit



In my daily work, I provide sterile equipment, health information, counseling, and access to substitution therapies when possible.

Sometimes, I simply listen to people who have no one else to listen to them.

Over the years, I have seen positive changes.

I have seen people protecting themselves.

I have seen people reducing or stopping drug use.

I have seen people rediscover their dignity.





addiction care and harm reduction at VLM



**Information** 



**OST Continuity and initiation** 



condoms



**HIV-HCV-HVB** treatment

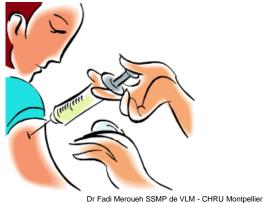




testing



vaccination

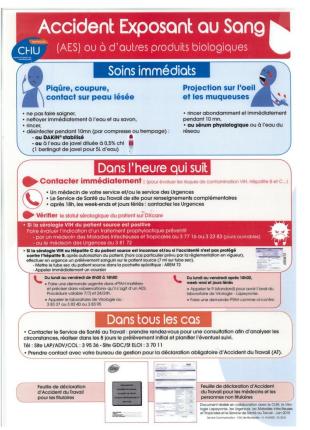




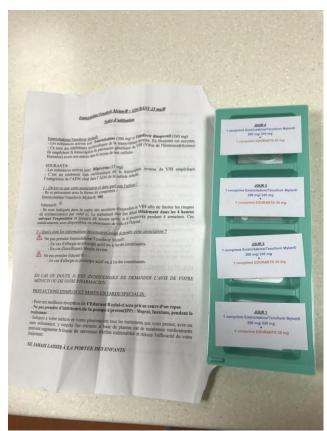




#### **Prophylaxie Post Exposition**















#### Hygiene and hairdressing



#### **Nicotine Substitutes**







#### / \ WITHOUT BY BARRIERS

#### RTP, crack pipe, aluminium $\ll$ chasing the dragon $\gg$









Prevention: Focus Group Body expression







Implementation of Naloxone take home













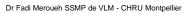


### **And this**













# Outcomes

No accidents after 13 years

Since 2017, we have managed to make "a prison without hepatitis C", thanks to new treatments coupled with the harm reduction policy.







# Challenges

Break fear.

Move faster.

Stand together.

Cut prison risks.





#### / \ HEALTH WITHOUT B BARRIERS

# Conclusion

In conclusion, working in harm reduction in prison/
is difficult,
is slow,
is exhausting,
Sometimes, it is dangerous.
But it is necessary.

Every small success matters. Every life protected is a victory.

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I continue, because I believe that change is possible.

One day, I hope harm reduction will be normal inside every prison, without fear, without obstacles.



# Never give up hope



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