



INTERNATIONAL DOCTORS FOR HEALTHIER DRUG POLICIES

**Global Nicotine Forum
Warsaw June 17-18 2016**

Cigarettes – what can be learned from heroin?

Doctors for healthier drug policies: lessons from drugs harm reduction and drug policy reform

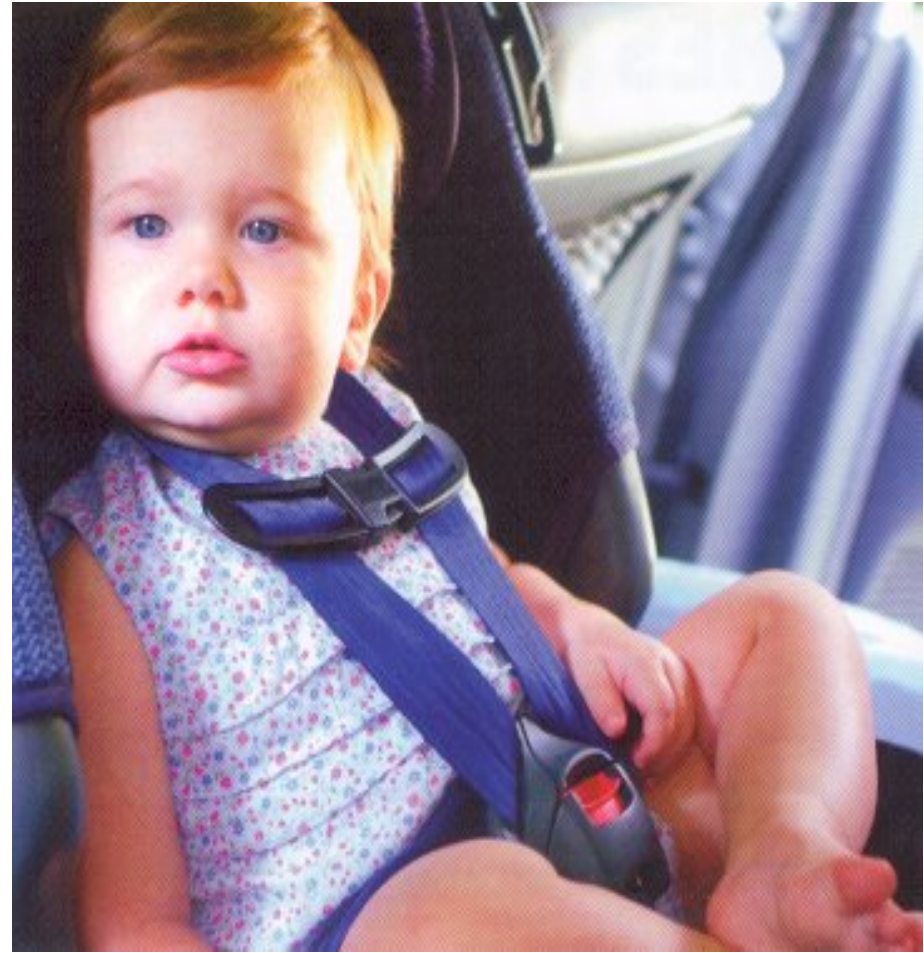
Dr Chris Ford & Sebastian Saville

IDHDP

Physicians globally unite for health based drug policy

What is harm reduction?

- Seat belts
- Looking both ways before crossing the road
- Cycle helmets
- Cup handles
- Water fluoridation
- Life jackets
- Passwords



Fundamentals of drug harm reduction

To prevent/reduce bad things happening to people

Keeping people out of bad places like the morgue, like an ambulance, like prison and many others

It benefits

- Individuals
- Families
- Communities
- Society

What is harm reduction in relation to cigarettes?

Nicotine does not in itself cause much damage to people – much the same as heroin

Just like heroin – it's the delivery system that causes the damage

With heroin, unscrupulous dealers – some would say as a result of prohibition – deliver adulterated product

Used syringes/needles deliver HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C

The delivery system for nicotine is tobacco in the cigarette. Hot smoke, carbon dioxide and various carcinogenic chemicals released by the hot smoke is what delivers the damage

What did we do about the heroin delivery systems?

- We provided clean needles and syringes

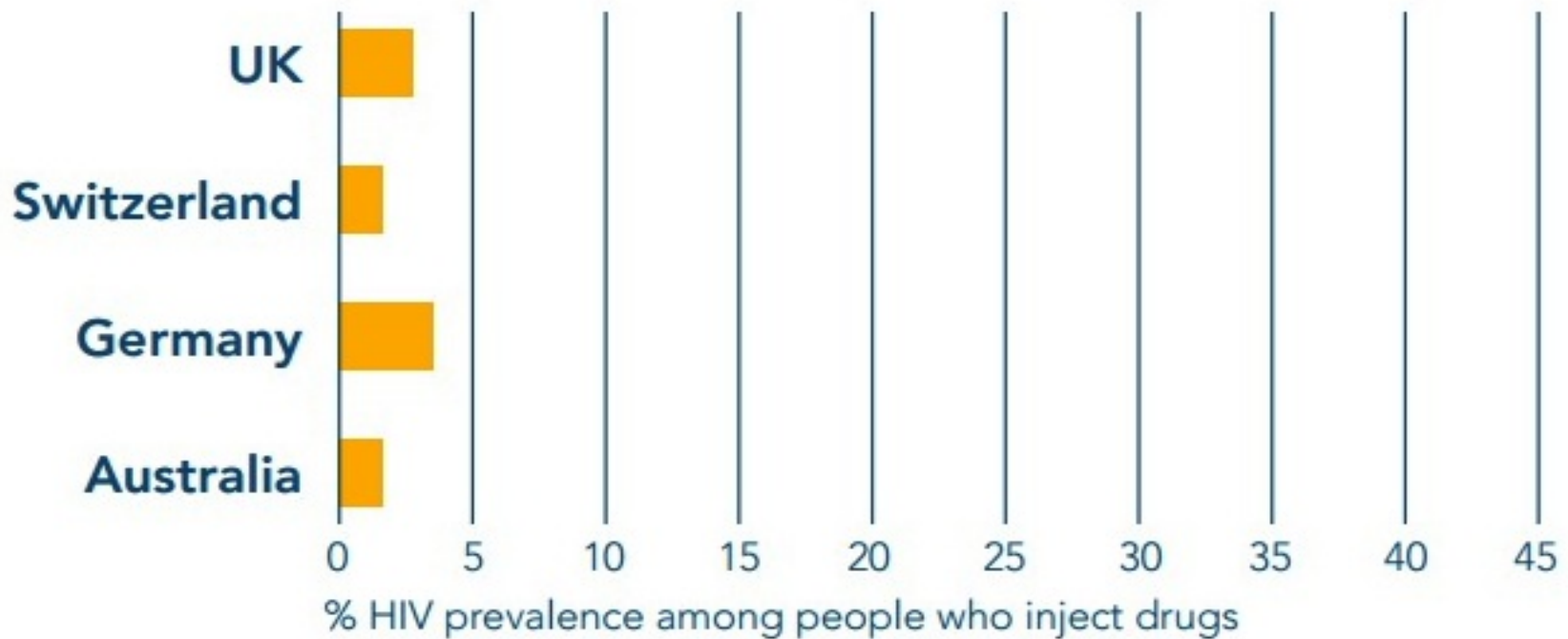


- We prescribed methadone and other drugs

Cornerstones of harm reduction

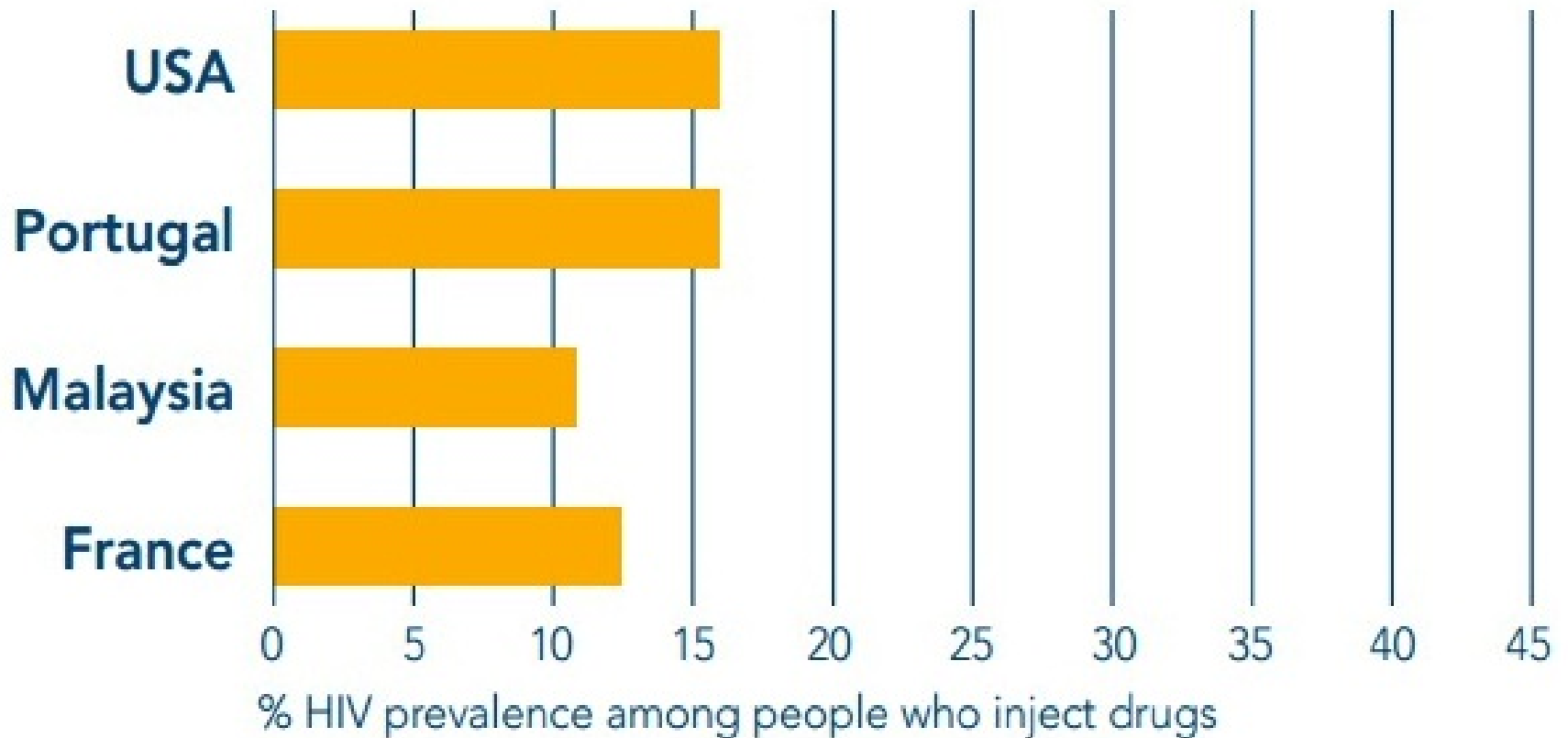
- Mass provision of sterile needles and syringes reduced the transmission of HIV enormously
- Provision of drugs like methadone improved health and reduced deaths
- Health based drug policies with a balanced and integrated whole system including:
 - Prevention
 - Supply
 - Treatment

Sample of countries that have consistently implemented comprehensive harm reduction strategies:



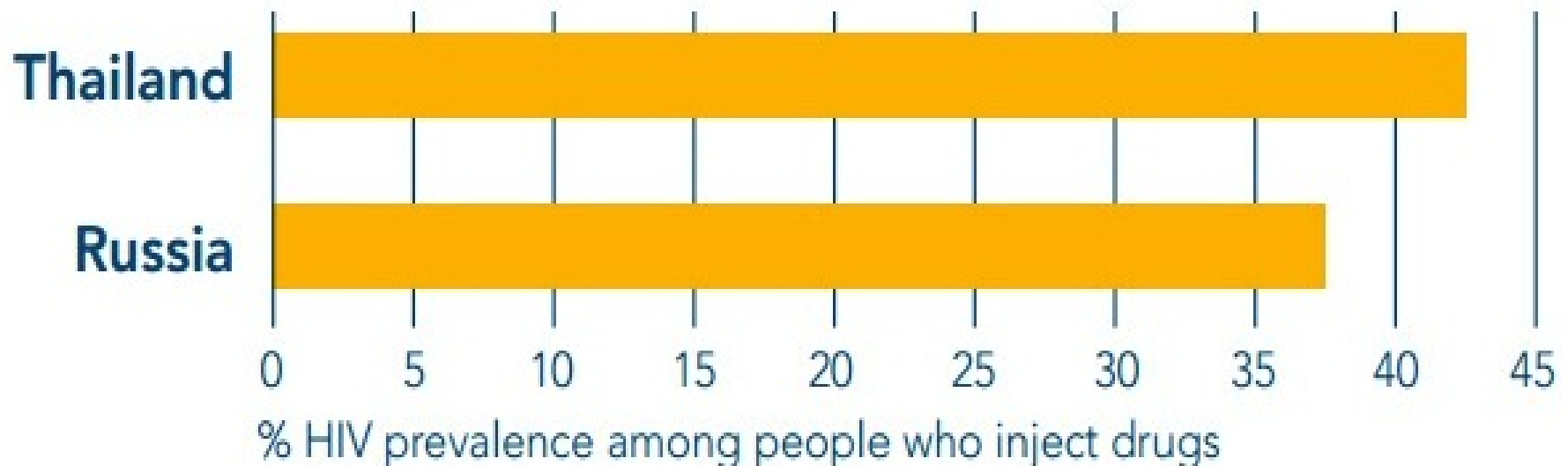
Source: War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy June 2011

Sample of countries that have introduced harm reduction strategies partially, or late in the progress of the epidemic:



Source: War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy June 2011

Sample of countries that have consistently resisted large scale implementation of harm reduction strategies, despite the presence of drug injecting and sharing:



Source: War on Drugs: Report of the Global Commission on Drug Policy June 2011

Successful experiments in drug policy:

1. Four Pillar approach in Switzerland

- Between 1991 and 2004, drug related deaths declined by more than 50%
- Levels of new HIV infections divided by 8 within 10 years
- 90% reduction of property crime committed by drug users
- 70% of injectors are now in some kind of treatment

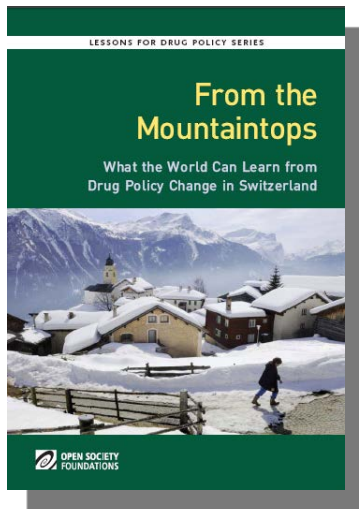
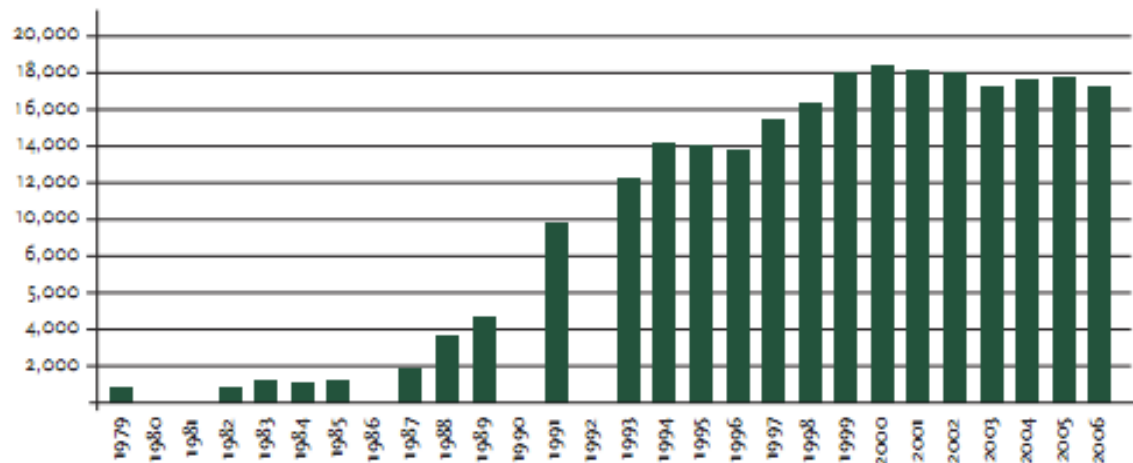


FIGURE 1: Number of methadone patients, Switzerland, 1979–2006



Source: Act-info: Nationale Substitutionsstatistik (Methadon) <http://www.nasuko.ch/nms/db/index.cfm>

Does harm reduction encourage drug use?

- We know for a fact that it prevented millions of people catching HIV and some HBV and HCV
- We know for a fact that it prevents thousands of overdoses
- We know for a fact that it acts as the most used and successful gateway to treatment
- The rest is conjecture

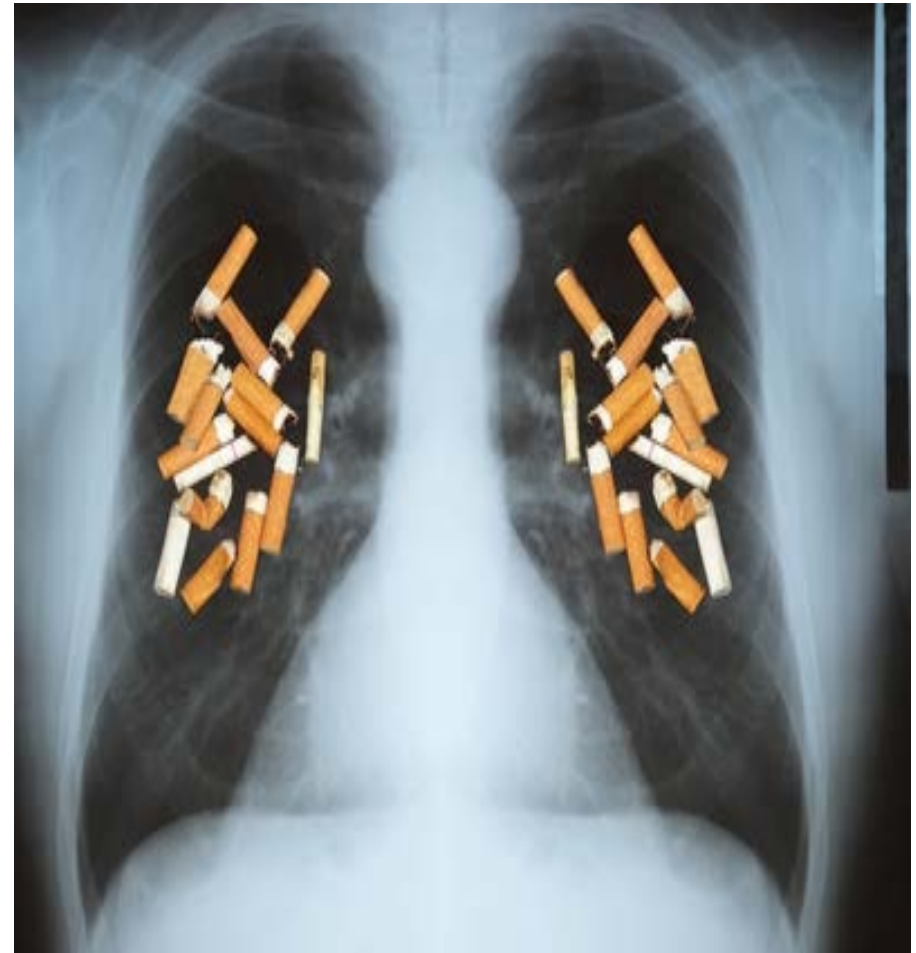
Are we now seeing the same with cigarettes?



- The drug (nicotine) is relatively harmless
- Again it's the delivery system that kills
- Tobacco - kills more people than almost anything else every year
- Now E-cigarettes have provided an answer

Does providing e-cigarettes encourage smoking?

- Yet again - we hear a lot of talk about it being tantamount to encouraging smoking
- The important thing is to stop people dying
- I put it to you that cigarettes can learn from the heroin experience



Twenty years from now?

- Do any of us want to be in one of the countries more concerned with abstinence than saving lives?
- Russia just recently confirmed its one millionth HIV+ in PWIDs – why? – because harm reduction initiatives are illegal
- In the UK we have one of the lowest prevalence of HIV among drug users – why? – because we put saving lives before dogma
- Let's continue putting the saving of lives above all moralistic opinions



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You will be adding your voice to a growing number of physicians calling for health based drug policies

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chris.ford@idhdp.com

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