

Background

- In 2012, New Jersey passed a law that allowed community pharmacists to dispense up to 10 syringes at a time without a prescription.¹ As part of that law, pharmacists are required to provide information regarding substance abuse treatment and syringe disposal at the point-of-sale.¹
- Based on a small study consisting of interviews of pharmacists from California, Mississippi, Kansas and New Jersey, there are differing ethical opinions relating to the sale of non-prescription syringes.²
- Due to recent changes in over-the-counter syringe availability, data to suggest varied ethical opinions of pharmacists, and the investigators' own personal experiences, this study aims to identify common perceptions and practices relating to the sale of non-prescription syringes by New Jersey community pharmacists.

Purpose

- To evaluate the perceptions and practices of New Jersey community pharmacists regarding the sale of non-prescription syringes.

Methods

- An Institutional Review Board-approved 32-question online survey was emailed to 13,497 registered New Jersey pharmacists.
- The survey collected demographic information (gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, community practice role, community practice setting), pharmacy-related practice behaviors, and pharmacists' perceptions regarding the dispensing of syringes without a prescription.
- Pharmacists' email addresses were publicly available through the New Jersey State Board of Pharmacy website.
- Inclusion criteria: ≥18 years old, practicing pharmacist in New Jersey, community pharmacist
- Exclusion criteria: partially completed surveys, non-practicing pharmacists in New Jersey, non-community pharmacists
- Data collection took place over a 10-day period (November 8th-18th, 2017). An initial email and two reminder emails were sent out (Days 5 and 10).
- Participant identifiers were not collected and survey responses were kept anonymous and confidential.

Results

Figure 1. Study Population

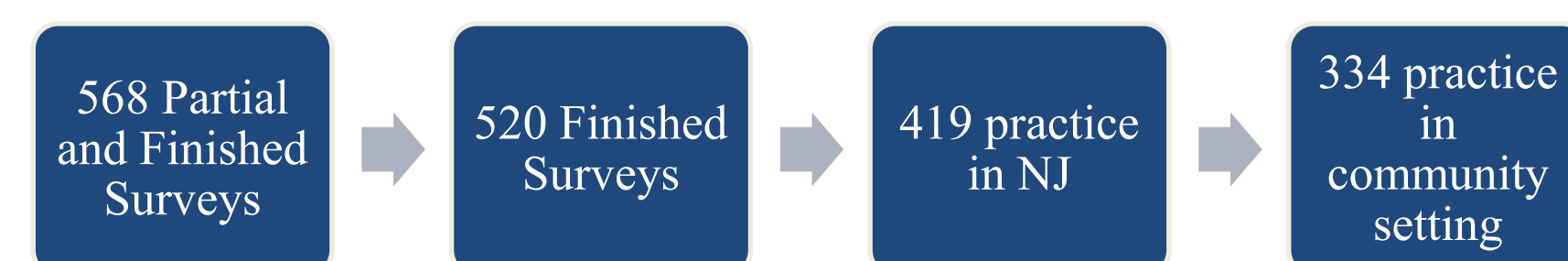


Table 1. Baseline Characteristics

Gender – no. (%)	
Female	180 (55.2%)
Male	145 (44.4%)
Bigender	1 (0.3%)
Race/Ethnicity – no. (%)	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1 (0.3%)
Asian	98 (30.2%)
Black/African American	7 (2.1%)
Hispanic/Latino	16 (4.9%)
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	2 (0.6%)
White/Caucasian	192 (59.2%)
Other	13 (4.0%)
Years in Practice – no. (%)	
<1 Year	8 (2.4%)
1-4 Years	77 (23.4%)
5-10 Years	76 (23.1%)
11-20 Years	60 (18.2%)
>20 Years	108 (32.8%)
Community Practice Role – no. (%)	
Staff Pharmacist	176 (54.1%)
Pharmacy Manager/Owner	82 (25.2%)
Pharmacy District Supervisor	3 (0.9%)
Pharmacist in Charge	83 (25.5%)
Other	14 (4.3%)
Community Practice Setting – no. (%)	
Chain	159 (48.6%)
Independent	94 (28.7%)
Supermarket	49 (14.9%)
Mass Merchandiser	6 (1.8%)
Big Box Store	14 (4.2%)
Other	18 (5.5%)

Table 2. Pharmacists' Practice Behaviors when Dispensing Syringes without a Prescription

Dispense Syringes without a Prescription – no. (%)	
Yes: 229 (68.5%)	No: 105 (31.4%)
Identification Practices – no. (%)	
Request Photo ID	
Yes: 148 (65.2%)	No: 79 (34.8%)
Document ID	
Yes: 63 (42.5%)	No: 85 (57.4%)
Company Policy to Request ID	
Yes: 44 (69.8%)	No: 19 (30.1%)
Information/education provided – no. (%)	
Provide Substance Abuse Information	
Yes: 97 (42.7%)	No: 130 (57.2%)
Provide Syringe Disposal Information	
Yes: 156 (68.7%)	No: 71 (31.2%)
Provide HIV/Hepatitis C Prevention Information	
Yes: 31 (13.7%)	No: 195 (86.2%)
Refused to Sell Syringes without a Prescription – no. (%)	
Yes*: 127 (55.7%)	No: 101 (44.3%)

*Typical refusal reasons: concerns of drug abuse, identification (no/invalid ID), customer behavior

Figure 2. Pharmacists' Support for the Dispensing of Syringes without a Prescription

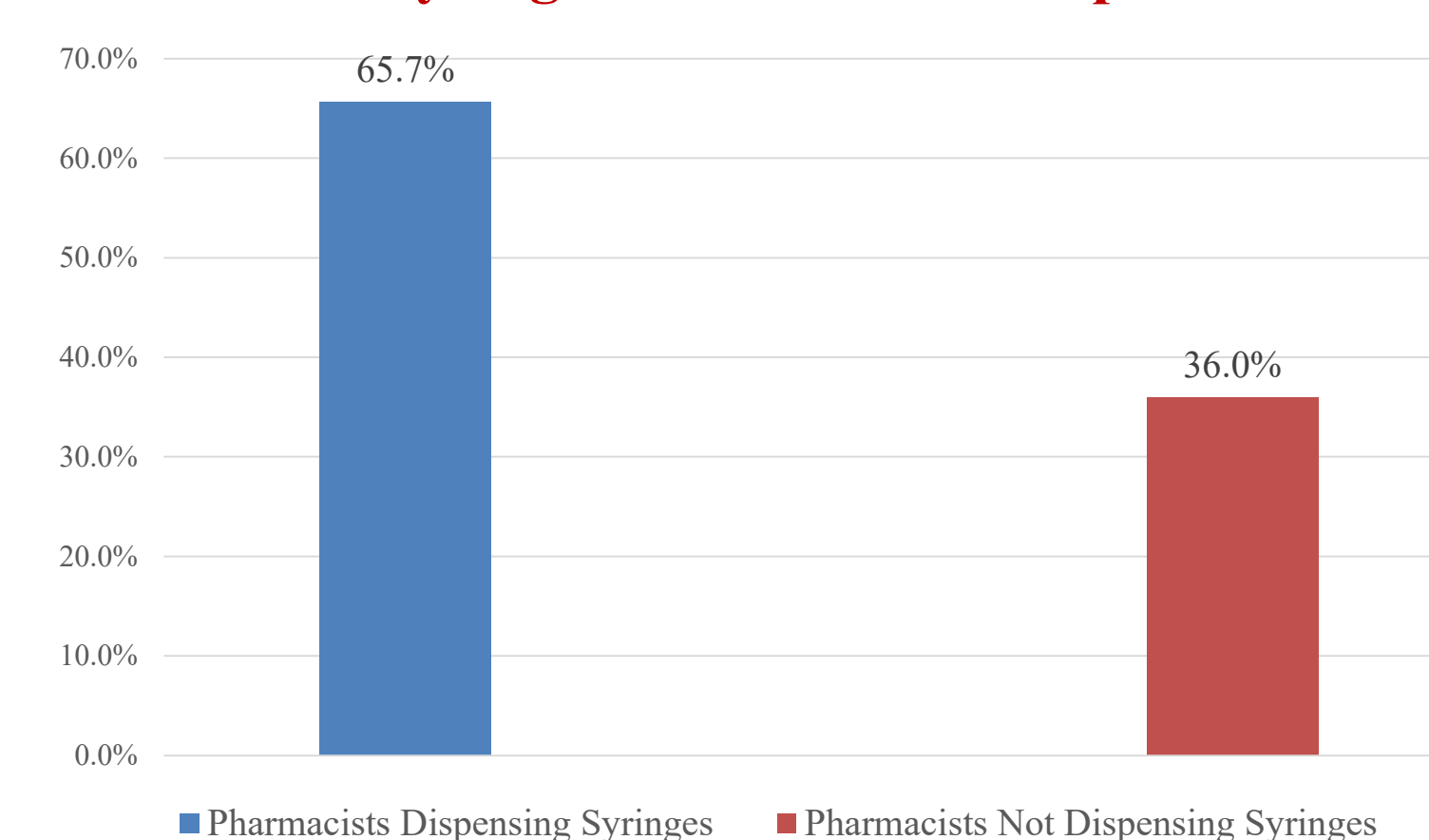
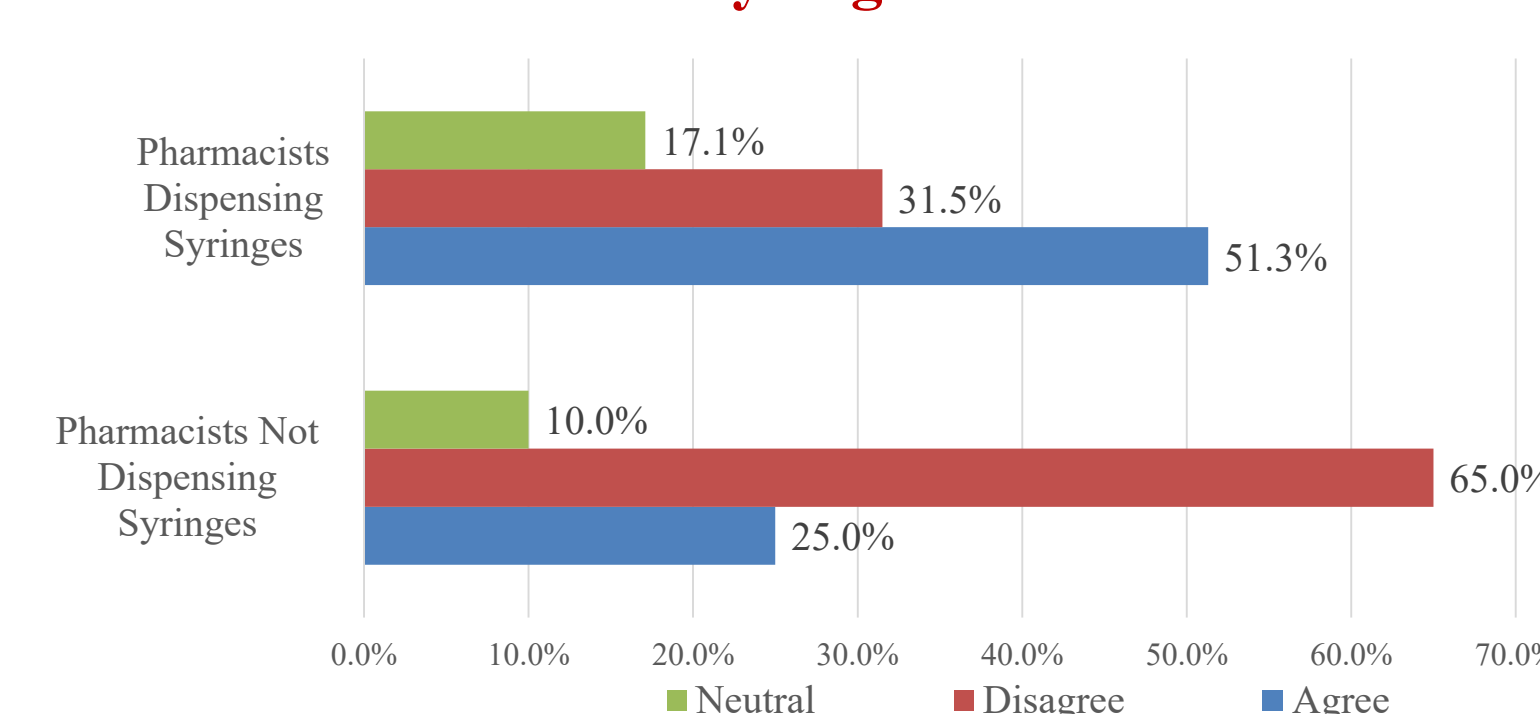
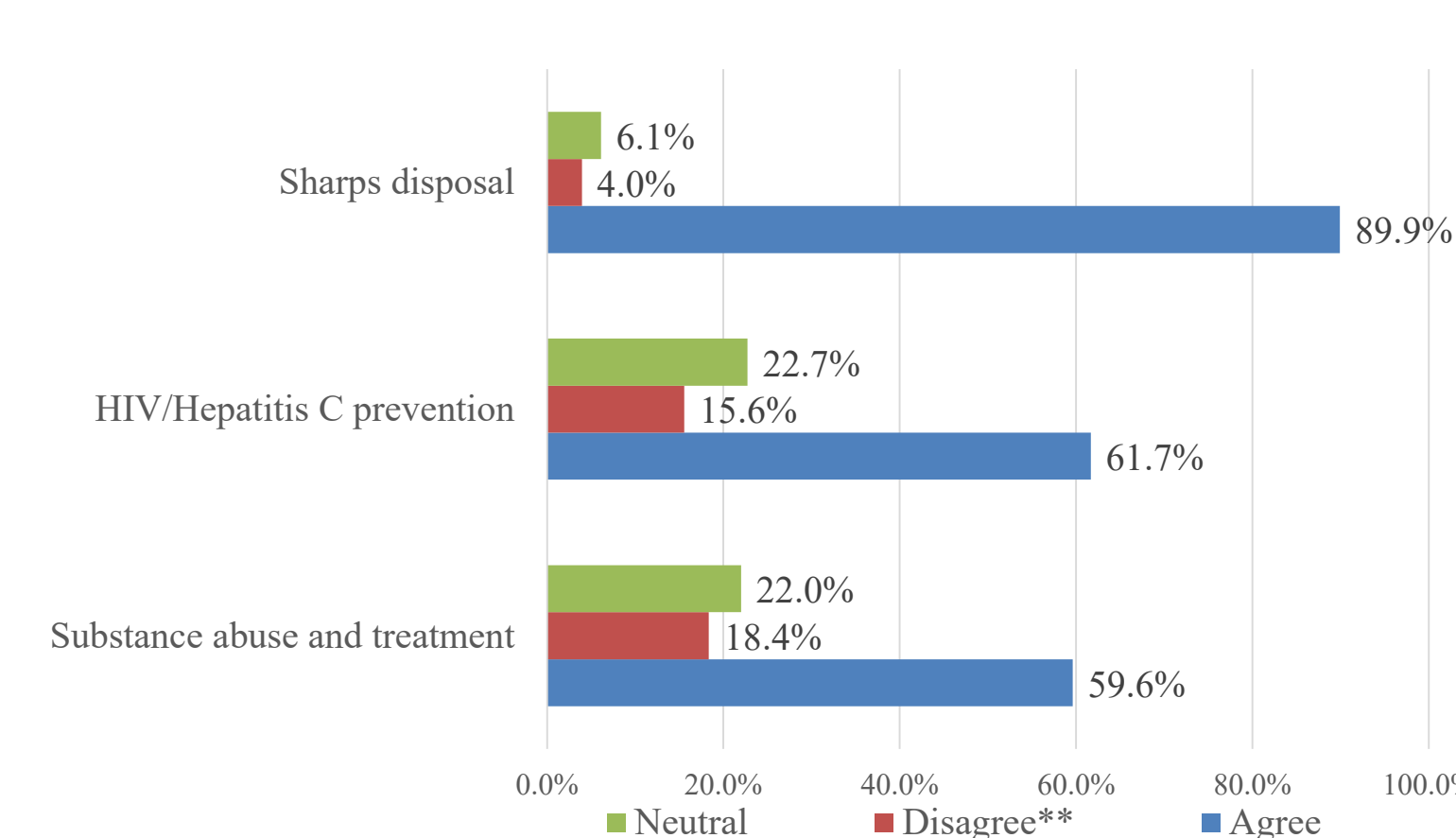


Figure 3. Pharmacists' Comfort with Dispensing Syringes



*92.1% are uncomfortable due to a concern of encouraging drug abuse and 15.63% are uncomfortable due to a lack of awareness with dispensing requirements.

Figure 4. Pharmacists' Comfort with Patient Education



Evaluation

- A majority of respondents indicated dispensing syringes without a prescription.
- More than half of pharmacists who dispense syringes without a prescription have refused to sell them in certain situations. The most common reasons are concern of drug abuse and lack of ID verification.
- Over 60% of pharmacists request identification before dispensing syringes.
- One-third of surveyed pharmacists do not provide information about syringe disposal and the majority do not provide information about substance abuse, despite regulations requiring them to do so.
- The majority of pharmacists who dispense syringes without a prescription believe that they should be available over-the-counter. Conversely, the majority of pharmacists who do not dispense syringes believe that syringes should not be available over-the-counter.

Limitations

- Email addresses were registered with the New Jersey State Board of Pharmacy may not have been up-to-date.
- The small study population may limit generalizability.
- Survey questions were not validated.

Conclusions

- New Jersey community pharmacists exhibit a variety of practices and opinions regarding the sale of over-the-counter syringes.
- Although required by law, substance abuse information is not being offered consistently to patients when dispensing syringes without a prescription.
- Efforts could be made to standardize practices and raise awareness about legality, counseling importance, and risks versus benefits of dispensing syringes without a prescription.

References

1. Sale by licensed pharmacy of hypodermic syringe or needle under certain circumstances, Pub.L. C.2C:36-6.2 (Jan 17, 2012).
2. Chiarello E. Non-prescription syringe sales: Resistant pharmacists' attitudes and practices. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 2016;166:45-50.

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