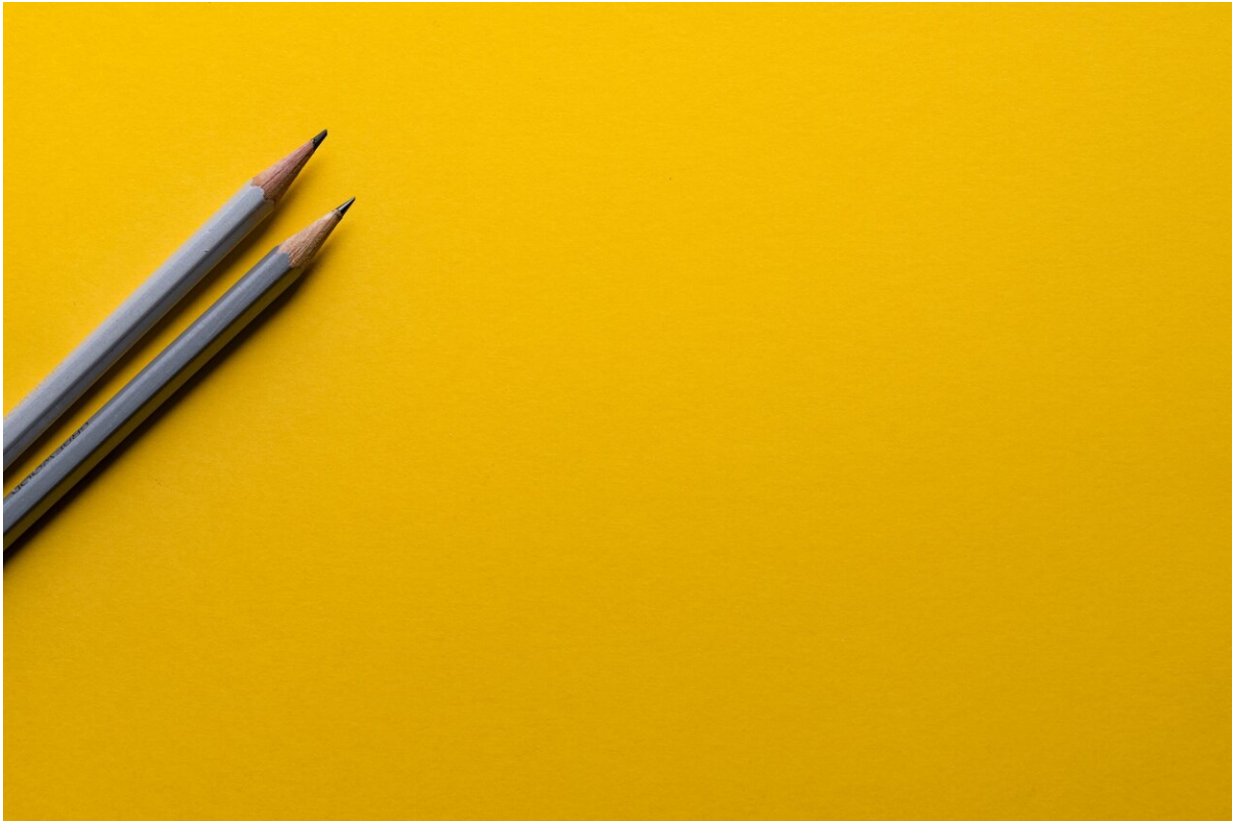


Pharmacists assist drug addicts and sex workers

December 2 2013



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Barely a quarter of pharmacists in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Montreal know about the MIP kit, or personal injection kit, containing syringes, sterile water ampoules, alcohol swabs, condoms, and an

information booklet. The kit is provided by the Direction de santé publique de Montréal to intravenous drug users through neighbourhood pharmacies. "We give advice to sick children, pregnant women, the elderly, the chronically ill... to everyone, including drug addicts, sex workers, and the homeless," says a video shot last year by students from Université de Montréal's Faculty of Pharmacy, which is now used to promote the kit.

"Pharmacists have several tools to help intravenous [drug users](#) inject safely and thus help reduce the prevalence of sexually and blood transmitted infections. The MIP kit is part of the solution," says the YouTube video, which has over 400 views. The twelve [students](#) who worked on this project as part of their course Service à la communauté received the Scientific Rigour Award at the symposium "Agir pour la santé: le pharmacien au cœur de sa communauté," on April 26.

"This year, the teams have once again excelled," said Johanne Collin, who is responsible for the course since its inception three years ago. "The course, in which teams of students must work on a community intervention project, takes them out of their comfort zone and is truly challenging. They are especially proud to present their results at the end of the year."

The pharmacist code of ethics has a prevention component that was taken into account when redesigning the doctoral programme in pharmacy in 2007. All students must now take this course. "Pharmacists do not just dispense drugs. They are first and foremost health professionals. We wanted to highlight the importance of this role," said Vice-Dean Chantal Pharand, who initiated this unique course in Quebec.

Two topics are featured each year. Last year, it was aging and sexual and reproductive health. Students conducted research, for example, on the optimal use of medications in the elderly, home support, prevention of

[sexually transmitted diseases](#), sexuality and disease, and social representations of gender. This year's topics are mental health and disabilities.

Community engagement can be conducted in one's own practice milieu. In 2011-2012, a project on obesity prevention led a group of future pharmacists to create a recipe guide for students. "Studies have shown that weight gain is a risk for new students in residence. They are under stress to be successful, experience autonomy for the first time, and do not always have the necessary tools for cooking. The group presented them with easy and nutritious recipes that were then sampled," said Collin.

The course outline states that students must "create new solutions and synergy to make a difference in our community and society." More specifically, the faculty wants to "promote the role of pharmacists as agents of change."

Marie-France Beauchesne is jointly responsible for the course, in which 400 students are enrolled. Michelle Normandeau, consulting pharmacist with the Direction de santé publique de Montréal, Caroline Robitaille, Aude Motulsky, and Pierre-Marie David, responsible for training, complete the team.

Provided by University of Montreal

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