Response 2:
in the Australian context

Ian Flaherty & Jennifer Holmes
Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre
Recovery and citizenship at the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre

Jennifer Holmes, Clinical Services Manager
Ian Flaherty, Research Co-ordinator
Medically Supervised Injecting Centre

- MSIC commenced operation in May 2001 as a trial
- Trial extended 3 times
- NSW Parliament passed legislation to lift trial status on 27 October
- MSIC continues to operate under licence
MSIC Objectives

- Reduce drug overdose deaths
- Provide a gateway to treatment
- Reduce public injection
- Help reduce the spread of blood-borne disease.
MSIC Operating Philosophy

• MSIC believes that the most practical and compassionate response to drug injecting is to minimise the harm associated with it.
• It does this by supervising injecting episodes that would otherwise occur under more hazardous circumstances, such as in public or alone. It provides a safer environment in which immediate medical assistance is available if required.
MSIC Reception
Activity per Month

Total number of injecting episodes PER MONTH

Number of supervised visits

May-01 | Nov-01 | May-02 | Nov-02 | May-03 | Nov-03 | May-04 | Nov-04 | May-05 | Nov-05 | May-06 | Nov-06 | May-07 | Nov-07 | May-08 | Nov-08 | May-09 | Nov-09 | May-10

0 | 1000 | 2000 | 3000 | 4000 | 5000 | 6000 | 7000 | 8000 | 9000
• Dave is a long term injecting drug user and current client of the MSIC. He started injecting drugs when he was 24 years old and is now 46 years old.

• He began attending the MSIC in 2003. Dave works during the day as a labourer and typically injects at the MSIC each evening after work.

• He has also changed his injecting behaviour and has been referred to multiple services, including drug treatment.

• He says that the MSIC is “a controlled safe environment and they can help with anything”.

Vignettes from KPMG Review
Vignettes from KPMG Review

- Trevor is a former client of the MSIC (2006-09)
- When he started using drugs, he was homeless and had recently found out he had Hepatitis C
- He wanted a clean, safe and supervised environment where he could inject.
- Since attending MSIC, he said he has stopped sharing drug equipment as a health promotion activity showing minute amounts of blood was a wake-up call.
- MSIC assisted him to access drug treatment by organising (and brokering) a private drug treatment place for him for six months.
- He now has his own apartment, is receiving treatment for Hepatitis C and is in the process of starting a job where he will encourage other people with Hepatitis C to be assessed for treatment.
- He no longer injects drugs
Treatment Setting & Recovery

- MSIC provides an environment that is safer than most injecting locations plus health promotion and referral to a wide range of health services.
- As MSIC clients bring their own drugs they control the type of drug used, the amount and the frequency.
- It can be argued that MSIC allows a greater degree of choice than traditional opioid substitution therapies.
- OST also have cumbersome administrative procedures and limited flexibility.
- Continued drug use is acceptable at MSIC and abstinence is not a condition for continued treatment.
- MSIC potentially provides an additional treatment setting for non prescribed recovery.
Key themes

1. Recovery strongly linked to active participation and responsible citizenship

2. Recovery exists along a continuum that includes harm reduction in one direction and abstinence in the other

3. Recovery is sometimes seen as moving from a ‘spoiled identity’ to ‘normality’
1. Recovery strongly linked to active participation and responsible citizenship

Recovery is largely equated with a process of ‘becoming normal’ or re-attaining ‘normality’

Normality is equated with material possessions, having ‘normal’ intimate relationships, a job or being engaged in education, and having mastery of the body, essentially participating in civil society

Recovery then is a key element to becoming a responsible citizen in late modernity
Key sites of responsible citizenship at MSIC

Reduction in mortality and morbidity associated with injecting drug use

16% of MISC attendees are in full-time employment

Democratising effects, especially for women

Learning and development

Most importantly, intimate personal relationships
Recap

Recovery = normality

Normality = material possessions, etc.

Material possessions = responsible citizenship

Therefore, recovery = responsible citizenship

Responsible citizenship enacted by the MSIC clients
Key sites of responsible citizenship at MMUs

Transition from a largely illegal practice to a practice that is considered socially responsible

Mastery of the body using a pharmaceutical recognised within the medical discourse as therapeutic

Return to ‘normal’ activities

With use of Suboxone there is also a freeing-up of treatment controls
2. Recovery exists along a continuum that includes harm reduction in one direction and abstinence in the other.
3. Recovery is sometimes seen as moving from a ‘spoiled identity’ to ‘normality’

The alterity of injecting drug use

MSIC as complementary to other forms of recovery from heroin dependency

Supports additional to opioid substitution therapy

Responsible citizenship and ‘normality’
Practice implications

Safer injecting

Addressing other trappings of ‘normality’, eg: shelter, food, income source, meaningful occupation, interpersonal relationships

That is, not only focussing on drug use