

# SMOKE IT ! Change of opiate use –from injecting to inhaling

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## Background

Despite immense and largely successful efforts to reduce the dangerous consumption of opiates by treatment and prevention, we must acknowledge that tens of thousands of heroin users who use drugs intravenously are exposed to significant morbidity and mortality risks every day. A report from the German Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction indicates a slight but constant drop in intravenous drug use in favour of inhalative drug use. Feedback from staff in drug consumption rooms has backed up this conclusion.

## Aim

The research project „SMOKE IT!“ researched to what extent a change of consumption method (from intravenous to inhalative) can be supported by making new equipment for drug use available, as well as by personal or media intervention.

The project also assessed whether or not dispensing new drug use equipment (foil, tubes) and accompanying literature (flyers, posters) can support those who prepared to change their method of drug use.

## Method

„SMOKE IT!“ was carried out as a multi-center study in drug consumption rooms in Frankfurt (two facilities), Berlin, Dortmund, Hamburg, and Bielefeld.

Participants received „SMOKE-IT-Packs“ in the form of a transparent pouch that contained smoking foils specially manufactured for heroin use, as well as literature (flyer, postcard) with information about inhalative drug use. The quantitative data collection was aided by a written questionnaire filled out at three different stages (T1, T2, T3) between April and August 2012. As part of the qualitative survey, interviews were carried out with responsible workers on the scene and two or three users at each consumption room.

## Results

Altogether, 165 questionnaires were analyzed at the Institute for Addiction Research, Frankfurt. At stage T2, 141 participants were re-questioned (re-attainment rate 85.5 %). At stage T3, 89 people still took part (re-attainment rate 54.0 %). Respondents were predominantly male (77.0 %) and were an average of 34.7 years old.

The participants had been taking heroin for an average of 13.3 years. Except for very few exceptions, almost all respondents had experience of the inhalative use of heroin (96.8 %).

The vast majority favoured using the foils from the SMOKE-IT-Packs (82.5 %). The bottom row of table 1 shows that two-thirds of the sample (65.3 %) used the SMOKE-IT foils for opiate instead of injecting.

	Sex		Age			Total
	M	F	19 - 29	30 - 39	40 +	
inhaling instead of intravenous use	(N=76)	(N=25)	(N=31)	(N=46)	(N=24)	(N=101)
Yes	71,10%	48,00%	71,00%	60,90%	66,70%	65,30%
No	28,90%	52,00%	29,00%	39,10%	33,30%	34,70%

Almost six out of ten (58.9 %) participants said that this form of consumption (smoking) was healthier than injecting, while 49.1 % said that curiosity was a factor in smoking with a foil. Some 35 % of participants named the reduced risk of a hepatitis or HIV infection as a particularly important factor. A third of the respondents used the smoking foils to avoid the danger of an overdose.

## Conclusions

The data shows that the targeted media and personal intervention in association with the dispensation of attractive drug use equipment can motivate opiate users to change their method of administration. Despite considerable damage to respiratory tracts through the inhalative use, one can conclude that inhalative consumption - in contrast to intravenous consumption - is significantly less dangerous, measured by the indicators „overdose“ and „viral infection“. In light of this, it would be advisable to encourage this method of consumption to a greater extent. Only a quarter (26.9 %) of the group examined at stage T3 used the inhalative consumption method exclusively. The fact that four-fifths of those asked said they would continue to use the SMOKE-IT foils if they were available leads to the recommendation that all drop-in centers should expand syringe-exchange services to include the dispensation of smoking foils.

## Literatur:

International Harm Reduction Journal (Rachael Pizzey, Neil Hunt: Distributing foil from needle and syringe programmes (NSPs) to promote transitions from heroin injecting to chasing 2008, 5:24)

The Provision of Foil in Needle and Syringe Programmes in the UK (Martin Chandler, Jamie Bridge, Anne Boid, Helen Wilks 2008)

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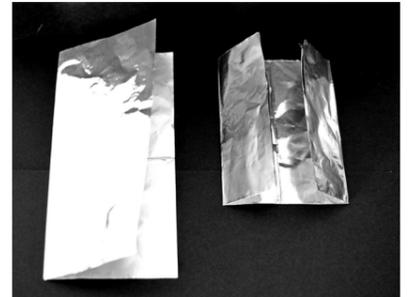
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## How to smoke heroin

1 Fold the foil like this



2 Roll the foil around a pen or a cigarette



3 A cigarette paper could make the pipe more stable



4 Melt the heroin by gently heating with a lighter.



5 Inhale the vapours and chase the heroin with the lighter flame.



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