

# Mobile Syringe Exchange as an Opportunity for Community Engagement and Medical Education



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## INTRODUCTION:

- People who inject drugs (PWID) are burdened by infections, abscesses, and overdoses.<sup>1</sup>
- In rural areas, supplies to keep PWID safe are often far away and travelling is a barrier.<sup>2</sup>
- Medical students are often removed from the realities of rural drug use.<sup>3</sup>
- It is important for students to be cognizant of ways to care for PWID and decrease stigma.<sup>4</sup>

## METHODS:

- We provided harm reduction equipment (sterile syringes, disposal methods, clean rigs, and fentanyl test strips), overdose prevention counseling, vein care information to PWID in Franklin county using a mobile van and texting app.
- We created a student interest group(SIG) at LCOM to stimulate conversations about harm reduction and PWID.
- We maintained relationships with PWID, and characterized the number of distinct and new participants, and secondary exchangers. We quantified syringes, fentanyl test strips, wound care kits and naloxone distributed to participants.
- We identified additional student leaders and completed the first overdose reversal training at LCOM.

## REFERENCES:

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## RESULTS:

In 2018, medical students dispensed:

- 22,194 syringes
- 28 hygiene kits
- 89 fentanyl test strips
- 29 doses of naloxone

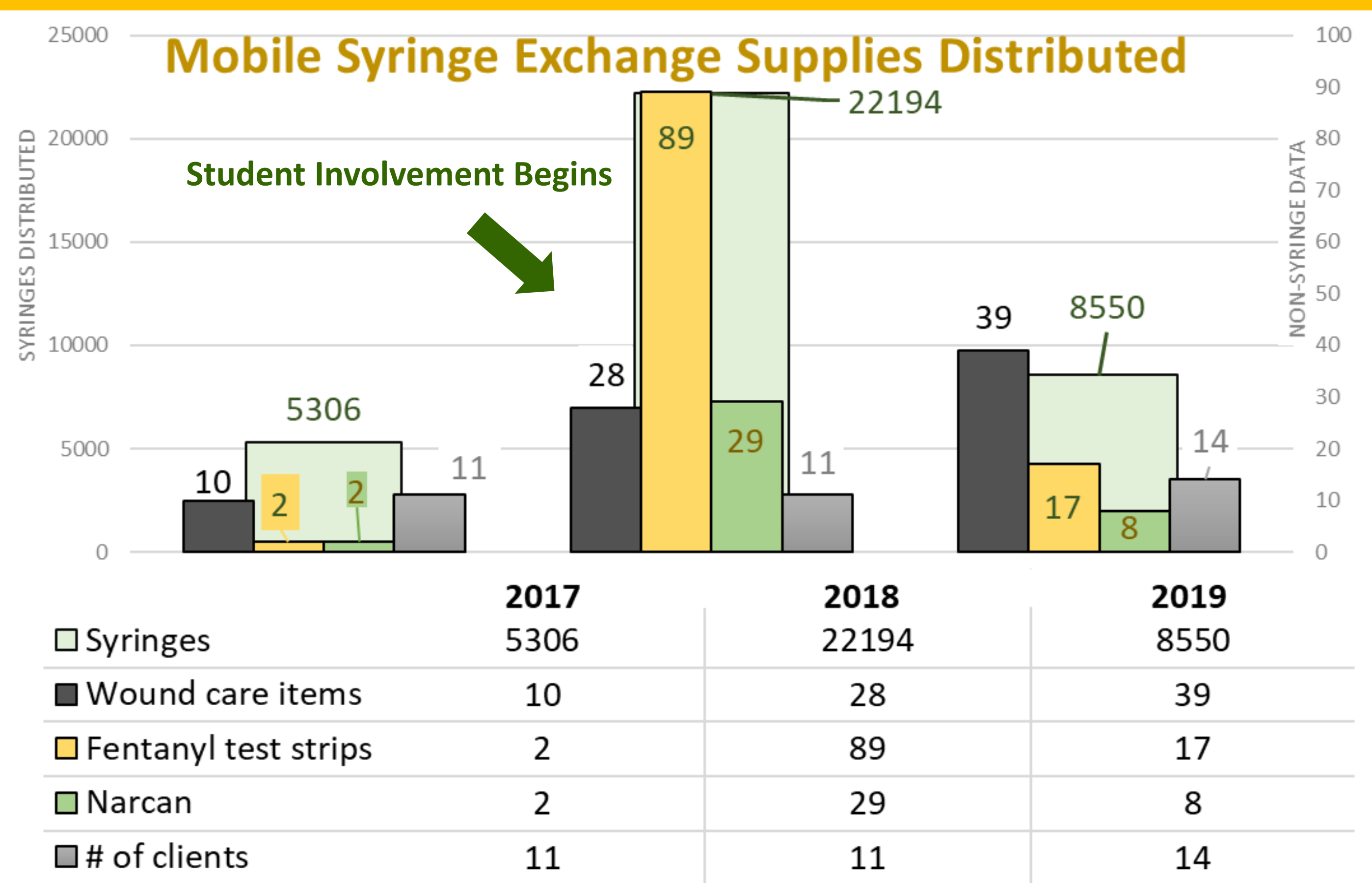
to 11 unique clients  
of which 11 were secondary exchangers.

In 2019, medical students dispensed:

- 8,550 syringes
- 39 hygiene kits
- 17 fentanyl test strips
- 8 doses of naloxone

to 14 unique clients  
of which 7 were secondary exchangers.

- In 2019, LCOM's first Harm Reduction SIG was created.
- 38 medical students enrolled
  - 4 student leaders were identified to continue the mobile exchange project
  - 46 students were trained in responding to overdose, all of whom were equipped with naloxone.



## DISCUSSION:

- Community engagement is an important educational experience for medical students to contextualize the lives of PWID.
- Such interactions generate powerful impressions that decrease stigma.<sup>3</sup>
- Medical students can play a role in serving PWID by providing an essential service, bringing educational components to their classmates, and engaging them in conversations about caring for PWID.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS:

- It is important to continue to expose medical students to the realities and medical needs of PWID through a variety of modalities.
- This could include service projects and sessions in which PWID are brought into the formal learning environment as educators.
- To gauge the effectiveness of these interventions, pre- and post-surveys regarding student perceptions could be administered, and service delivery should continue to be quantified.

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