



New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) and prisons

a practical response to a growing problem



Our offer of help to combat NPS in prisons

New Psychoactive Substances or NPS are having a profound impact on the prison estate, young people and local communities. In prisons, synthetic cannabinoids – known as ‘Spice’ are at the heart of increases in violence and bullying, acute health crises requiring accident and emergency hospital attendances and have been implicated in 19 prison deaths. Many NPS are already controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act and on April 6th 2016, the law will change making it a criminal offence to possess or supply any Psychoactive Substances in prisons. However, many NPS cannot be detected by urine tests or drug dogs and so significant challenges remain.

Change, grow, live (formerly known as Crime Reduction Initiatives) are determined to work with prisons and develop new and effective ways to reduce the demand for NPS and help prisons restrict supply. CGL have developed a strategic approach to help prisons tackle NPS and have recruited the help of Annette Dale-Perera, a national expert in NPS and prison healthcare. Annette is on the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) and an expert member of the group responsible for the national evidence-based guidance on the treatment of NPS - Neptune Guidance (Novel Psychoactive Treatment UK Network). CGL’s strategy is to go way beyond ‘awareness training’ and offer a suite of consultancy services, advice, training, and NPS specific drug treatment packages.

If you are a prison governor, healthcare provider or commissioner interested in exploring all, or part of these services, please contact Mike Pattinson, CGL Executive Director, on: 07773 394335 or email mike.pattinson@cgl.org.uk

We offer:

Bespoke 1.5 hour NPS training for prison and healthcare staff to raise awareness of NPS and know how to better respond.

One day training for staff requiring skills to treat NPS users including primary care and substance misuse workers.

A guide to interpreting the Neptune guidance, explaining how to treat NPS acute health issues and chronic use.

Service user briefings on NPS.

A series of detailed information briefings for staff on NPS including: effects, harms; acute and chronic healthcare responses.

Brief Interventions and Extended Brief Interventions for NPS users with mild to moderate problems.

A 6 to 9 session programme for NPS users with moderate to complex problems.

Consultancy services to prisons including: getting drug finds tested; training packages for prison and healthcare staff which are tailored to the needs of prisons; development of strategies to improve the response of the whole prison healthcare system to NPS; training prisoner ‘experts by experience’ in NPS and helping build drug-free communities in prison.

Background:

What are New Psychoactive Substances?

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime describes New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) as “substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled substances, but which may still pose a public health threat”. NPS may be referred to as ‘legal highs’ (although many contain illegal substances), ‘research chemicals’, or by a brand name such as ‘Spice’ for synthetic cannabinoids. Some drugs labelled NPS are legitimate medicines such as ketamine and nitrous oxide. New Psychoactive Substances are made by chemists to mimic the effects of more ‘traditional drugs’ such as cocaine and cannabis. Many are ‘white powders’ or solutions sprayed on plant material or paper and it is often impossible to know what exact chemicals have been used - or their strength and effects.

NPS - the growing threat in prisons

The increased use of NPS and the problems it causes including: death; acute health episodes requiring A&E attendance; bullying and violence, has been recently highlighted in the Chief Inspector of Prisons Report, 2015. In particular the use of synthetic cannabis, nicknamed ‘Spice’ has been associated with attacks by offenders, prison officers collapsing from the inhalation of dangerous fumes and the emergence of iPhone footage showing prisoners taking drugs and passing out in their cells. The latest statistics show that the number of serious assaults on staff and the number of serious assaults in prison have more than doubled since 2012 with NPS thought to be one of the ‘root causes’. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman further found that between April 2012 and September 2014, there were in 19 deaths in prison where the prisoner was known, or strongly suspected, to have been using NPS-type drugs before their deaths. Furthermore, NPS use can be difficult to determine as many NPS cannot be detected by urine tests or drug dogs and chemical compounds are continually being ‘tweaked’ by chemists to avoid detection. As a result, NPS are very appealing to individuals who want to use drugs without the risk of a positive drug tests.

A call to action by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons

Nick Hardwick the former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has called for a dynamic, responsive and well-coordinated strategy to be put in place, both to reduce the harm of current use and to respond effectively to future needs. He commented that “New Psychoactive Substances such as ‘Spice’ and ‘Mamba’ are now the most serious threat to the safety and security of jails, “No-one should be in any doubt about the harm that drug misuse does in prisons. It damages prisoners’ health and sometimes causes deaths. Debt associated with synthetic cannabis use sometimes leads to violence and prisoners seeking refuge in the segregation unit or refusing to leave their cells. Profits from drug supply may be used to fund organised criminal activity in the community.”

In the thematic report in December 2015 entitled ‘Changing patterns of substance misuse in adult prisons’, recommendations for Ministers and the National Offender Management Service included:

- A prison’s drugs and alcohol strategy needs to be embedded into every department, with effective structures to coordinate activity across the prison.
- The development by every prison of a peer-led programme of substance misuse education, with effective resources to educate prisoners, particularly new arrivals, about the dangers and other consequences of synthetic cannabis use.
- The development and delivery of national resources to ensure that all staff in prisoner contact roles are trained to understand the symptoms and consequences of synthetic cannabis use and that they are aware of how to deal with it.

The crucial role of frontline workers

Healthcare professionals are key to a strategic approach to dealing with the effects of NPS use in prison. However, healthcare systems often lack a joined-up approach to NPS and lack clear guidance and training beyond awareness training. CGL have taken the new Neptune national guidance on NPS and created information and prison training packages, which give workers skills and practical solutions for dealing with NPS use in prisons.

Change, grow, live's response to NPS in prison

By listening to the concerns of prison governors, commissioners and healthcare staff, we have created a number of resources that will help take a proactive approach to the problems of NPS in prisons. Our resources include:

Bespoke 1.5 hour NPS training for prison and healthcare staff

This training not only raises awareness of NPS, it informs participants how to better respond and starts a process of them developing a more proactive approach to NPS, whether they are prison officers, healthcare, or education specialists. The training was piloted with staff in Belmarsh and all participants rated it as very good or excellent. One commented it “was the best training I have been on in 10 years”. As a result, we are training Belmarsh governors in May.

One day training for primary care and substance misuse workers in NPS interventions

This training is based on the new 2015 national evidence-based guidance on the treatment of NPS - Neptune Guidance (Novel Psychoactive Treatment UK Network). This was developed from latest evidence and expert clinical consensus and is the most comprehensive NPS evidence based interventions available. The training was piloted in HMP Belmarsh and has now also been delivered in HMP Thorn Cross and HMP Risley – and many community settings.

The training gives healthcare and substance misuse staff the knowledge and confidence to address NPS issues and to transfer the existing skills they already possess in the assessment and treatment of acute health issues and chronic issues caused by NPS. The package covers the different types of NPS and demystifies these drugs. It empowers participants to effectively screen people for NPS use and provide evidence-based brief interventions to reduce harm and encourage quitting NPS.

The package enables participants to:

- Increase knowledge about NPS
- Understand the history of NPS
- Recognise drug groups how NPS fit into these groups can be treated accordingly
- Understand different subgroups of NPS users including the drug and health issues they may have
- Respond better to acute health episodes caused by NPS
- Be able to offer screening, harm-reduction advice and brief interventions to NPS users
- Offer evidence based bespoke NPS drug treatment options

Participants are also given a training manual and a new suite of CGL NPS drug information which is also available based on Neptune, for future reference

Neptune guidance

A CGL guide to the Neptune guidance on how to treat NPS acute health issues and chronic use

The Neptune guidance is a large reference document written in technical and scientific language. CGL has translated this document into a six page easy guide for any staff who may be working with NPS users – to help them understand the latest evidence-based responses to NPS use and misuse.

CGL have translated the many pages of the Neptune guidance's technical information into four sets of NPS briefings for staff on the most commonly available NPS drug groups: synthetic cannabinoids; stimulants; depressants and hallucinogens. These briefings provide up-to-date information on specific drugs and groups of NPS including: what they look like; how they are used; their wanted and unwanted effects; acute and chronic potential harm and how to respond.

CGL bespoke NPS treatment interventions based on the Neptune guidance include:

A 6 to 9 session programme for NPS users with moderate to complex problems which utilises treatment techniques recommended by Neptune including: NPS monitoring; cognitive behavioural techniques to analyse use and develop techniques to quit and prevent relapse; cognitive mapping; building supportive non drug using networks and addressing drug dealing and use.

A model of brief interventions and extended brief interventions for NPS users with mild to moderate problems.

NPS drug screening tools that can be included in assessments.

CGL/Annette Dale-Perera NPS consultancy to prisons

CGL, together with Annette Dale-Perera are also offering consultancy services to prisons to help them develop strategic ways to combat the problems caused by NPS use. The timing of this offer is important with the new Psychoactive Substances Act due to be enacted in 2016, which will make the possession and supply of all psychoactive substances illegal in prisons. The smoking ban, being rolled out across the prison estate may also have an impact on NPS use with some predicting a switch from smokable products to more 'white powders' and paper or other materials impregnated with NPS 'solutions'. The consultancy services we offer includes helping develop a systems approach to NPS featuring all or any of the following services:

- Helping prison develop a proactive strategy that includes prison officers, healthcare, substance misuse, and education in a co-ordinated approach. Local A&E and paramedic teams can also be included if the prison has high volumes of "blue lights".
- Working with prisons to get drug finds tested.
- Providing cross-discipline 1.5 to 2 hour training sessions on NPS and how to respond, for prison and healthcare staff. Training is tailored to the needs of prison eg in light of drug finds or 'outbreaks of particular NPS'.
- One day training of primary healthcare, mental health and substance misuse workers to increase awareness and competency in being able to deal with acute and chronic impacts of NPS in line with Neptune guidance.
- Bespoke information for prisoners on NPS drugs – especially on synthetic cannabinoids.
- Sessions for dealers of NPS – to help them see the damage NPS can cause and discourage this behaviour.
- Training prisoner 'experts by experience' in NPS and helping build drug-free communities in prison.

Helping combat the challenges posed by NPS

Please contact us to discuss how we can help you combat the challenges posed by NPS:

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