Piercing problems for Health

Primary Health Care

Strategies for Change
Health Need Identified

Creating Supportive Environment for Health

Strengthening Community Action

Developing Personal Skills

Building Healthy Public Policy

Prevention
Brand New Body/Ear Piercing Gun Kit
W/128 Steel Studs  AU $9.99

Tongue Piercing Kit - FULLY STERILISED-
Body Piercing AU $17.00

Piercing parties

Chemist

Urban culture

Health Need – Local Dynamics
Rates of body piercing

A survey in 1998 reported 31.5% of Australians had their ears pierced.

A Department of Health and Ageing survey in 2001 showed that 8 per cent of Australians had some form of body piercing, excluding ear piercing.

Body piercing was more common among the younger Australians, particularly younger women with one in five women aged around 20 reporting body piercings.

One in eight younger men reported body piercings.
Tattoos and body piercing

Your under-18 teenager needs your permission to have a tattoo. Tattooists are committing a criminal offence and can be fined or imprisoned if they tattoo your under-18 without your written consent.

All material is © Media 21 Publishing, and originally appeared in the February 2006 issue of GoodMedicine magazine.
The survey was distributed to 32 commercial body piercers in metropolitan Adelaide and near country areas of South Australia. The recipients were selected from the Yellow Pages or recommended by practitioners operating within the industry.

A total of 22 Body piercers returned the survey.

In your opinion, what was the main contributing factor resulting in the above infections or injuries?

Have you ever referred people with body piercing infections or injuries to a GP or local hospital/clinic? If so, how many?

What in your opinion needs to be done with regards to making access to professional body piercing safer for consumers?
Number of People Treated by Body Piercers

Number of people treated by body piercers: 217, 102, 47, 44, 410
Body Piercers report on number and parts of the body injured

- 333 injuries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of the body</th>
<th>Number of injuries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyebrow</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Navel</td>
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<td>Tongue</td>
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<td>Lip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nipple</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Genitalia</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Body Piercers report on number and parts of the body infected

Number of infections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of the body</th>
<th>Number of Infections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ear</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyebrow</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navel</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongue</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lip</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipple</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitalia</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

618 infections
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Piercing site</th>
<th>Healing time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face (this includes the earlobes, eyebrows, nose, and lips)</td>
<td>6 to 8 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ear cartilage</td>
<td>6 to 12 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside of the mouth or the tongue</td>
<td>3 to 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nipple</td>
<td>2 to 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital</td>
<td>Up to 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navel</td>
<td>Up to 12 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In your opinion, what was the main contributing factor resulting in the above infections or injuries?

The body piercers concluded that the main cause for the infection rates was poor after-care. This included lack of, or inaccurate, after care advice.

Further contributing factors identified by body piercers included:

- Incorrect procedure e.g. incorrect use of piercing gun
- Incorrect jewellery used for piercing procedures – size and quality
- Unhygienic technique when performing the piercing
- Backyard operators – lack of or no training
- Allergy to jewellery (nickel allergy - rare)
Have you ever referred people with body piercing infections or injuries to a GP or local hospital/clinic? If so, how many?

176 referrals

Photo Source – CarolineK – www.doctortoday.co.uk
What in your opinion needs to be done with regards to making access to professional body piercing safer for consumers?

Common response themes focused on:

- a need to not only educate consumers about the risks associated with a piercing procedure but also to provide correct and consistent after-care advice; clients are often given incorrect and conflicting information, and sometimes no information at all.

- the need for accreditation of body piercing practitioners and education in safe work procedures; body piercers suggest that although most infection may have been due to poor after-care, a number of problems could be attributed to operator ignorance of the risks involved with body piercing - often body piercing is undertaken by untrained individuals.

Other issues deemed by body piercers as needing attention included:

- a decrease in ‘production line’ shops
- guidelines on jewellery suitable for piercing
Southern Division GP - Research with Collaborative Partners

Number of Member GPs: 400
Number of Member Practices: 97
Population of SDGP catchment area: 350,000
The percentage of SDGP GPs who have treated or advised a patient with infection or injury following a body piercing.

134 GPs responded to the survey
During this study we received a total of 134 surveys from GPs practicing in the Southern area. From their feedback, it was calculated that, in the past 12 months, 410 people had been treated for a body piercing by a responding GP belonging to the SDGP.

There are approximately 400 GPs practicing in the Southern Division of General Practice. If we extrapolate these figures, we can predict there could be as many as 1,230 cases of body piercing infection or injury treated by GP’s in the southern area in any 12 month period.
Areas of the body which GP’s had treated for a piercing injury

Areas of the body which GP’s had treated for a body piercing infection
Hep C is now the most common notifiable communicable disease in Australia

Currently 260,000 Australians are infected with Hep C, with 16,000 new infections projected to be occurring annually.

It is estimated that each new Hep C infection costs the Australian Health System approximately $60,000 in long term treatment costs not to mention the social and emotional costs to individuals and families.

By 2020, projections of the number of people living with Hepatitis C are likely to be between 321,000 and 836,000, depending on future patterns of injecting drug use.

“It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near one”. J. R. R. Tolkien
### Hepatitis C Surveillance in South Australia

Hepatitis C Medical Notification 01/04/06 - 30/06/06

Hepatitis C infection, 01/04/06 - 30/06/06 and year to date.

Exposure category by sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exposure category</th>
<th>2nd Quarter 01/04/06 - 30/06/06</th>
<th>Year to date 01/01/06 - 30/06/06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDU¹</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDU / tattoos</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood transfusion/products ²</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tattoos</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High prevalence country⁴</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other³</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/not identified</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Injecting drug use (IDU)

2 Blood transfusion pre-1990

3 Includes exposure to blood through injury, household & perinatal transmission, acupuncture & body piercing

4 Birth, residence/medical treatment in a high prevalence country overseas.
Transmission of Hepatitis C Through Swapping Body Jewellery

Age 17
- Successful blood donation
- Successful blood donation

Age 18
- Body piercing placed
- Successful blood donation

Age 19
- Blood donation, hepatitis C positive

worrying new trends
In a 12-month period the SDGP reported many individual presentations from piercing infection/injury.

If we were to estimate an average figure for a level B consult of $50.00 for a standard piercing infection – the cost of these injuries in the southern area alone would be approximately $61,500.00

The cost of an antibiotic like Cephalexin to treat infection is approximately $15.00

Consideration also needs to be given to those longer term effects associated with a complex range of psychological and physiological issues requiring extensive and costly counselling, plastic surgery and dental work.
For the 05/06 financial year Noarlunga Hospital reports the following costs for a person presenting at the ED:

Patient admitted via ED - $390 approx.
Patient discharged from ED [as opposed to admitted] - $210 approx.

Detailed data regarding injuries and infections, such as that in the Victorian Injury Surveillance System [VISS] is not readily available.

Victorian data indicates significant numbers of people presenting to ED for body piercing injuries and infections. We can therefore predict that a similar pattern exists in SA Emergency Departments.
Participation in planning, implementation and evaluation

Given the significance of this feedback a range of strategies need to be developed and implemented to address this issue within the southern area. These may include:

- ensuring that those who provide skin penetration procedures are trained in best practice and have access to education and training in implementing a range of sound infection control and first aid strategies

- consulting with members of the body piercing industry to ensure appropriate written after-care advice is supplied

- developing targeted educational resources and programs that link into existing health education to enable young people to make informed and healthy choices in regard to body piercing

- improving the knowledge and skills of school counsellors and teachers in regard to the health risks associated with body piercing e.g. infection and blood borne viruses such as HIV, Hepatitis B or C.
Proposed Program Intervention

= healthy body art
Body Piercers First Aid and Blood Awareness Workshops

Awareness – Knowledge – Behaviour – Practice - Guidelines - Policy
Building Healthy Public Policy

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE TATTOOING & BODY PIERCING INDUSTRIES
"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out."

*Decca Recording Co. rejecting the Beatles, 1962.*
"Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?"
Atomic energy might be as good as our present-day explosives, but it is unlikely to produce anything very much more dangerous.  
*Winston Churchill* (1939)
Body is made up of 75% water
Blood 83%
Brain 95%
Lungs 95%
Muscles 75%
Let’s do it

Old African proverb:

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together..”
Graphics Kindly Provided by:

- PolyMorph – Sydney
- Primal Urge – Perth
- The Piercing Shop – UK
- The Ink Cup – USA
- Rocky’s Tattoo - USA
- City of Stockholm, Environment and Health

Janet Vials

www.doctortoday.co.uk
Thank You

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