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Needle exchange director discusses drug addiction

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Psychotherapist Adolfo Profumo, director of the largest needle exchange program in New York City, spoke at a Columbia University Harm Reduction Session (CUHRES) meeting Monday night in Hamilton Hall.

Profumo's program, New York City Harm Reduction Educators, Inc., which is based in Harlem, annually gives out 40,000 sterile hypodermic syringes to more than 12,000 drug users.

The program is intended to prevent the spread of HIV through the sharing of used syringes. One in 25 New Yorkers is thought to carry

HIV, Profumo said.

According to Profumo, the program also encourages users to get treatment for their abuse and studies the pressures that lead people to use drugs.

"We are all lost in life. The drug user is a person who is appropriately lost and attempts to deal with his or her existential despair by using drugs," Profumo said.

Profumo also discussed the problem of having an American culture that he says does not see drug addiction as a symptom of a much larger problem.

“Our society sees addiction as the problem. It does not see it as a symptom of a much larger illness,” Profumo said.

Profumo said his program also works with addicts through on-street massages and acupuncture, which he said shows users that there are other ways to experience pleasure without the use of drugs.

“We want to help the user enhance the pleasure life can provide,” Profumo said.

The program refers 200 to 300 drug users to medical treatment monthly.