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## // Addicts unconcerned about shared needles

IT IS not ignorance about AIDS that leads many of Hongkong's drug addicts to share needles, according to two former heroin addicts who now work to rehabilitate others.

It is the unavailability of disposable plastic syringes which causes many to risk sharing a needle — a gamble akin to playing Russian Roulette.

"Addicts know about AIDS, but they will take the risk and share needles because they know the percentage of drug addicts who have caught AIDS is very low," said the warden of a halfway-house for addicts, who asked to be named only as Mr Mok.

Mr Mok, an ex-heroin addict, has spent five years working for the Society for the Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers (SARDA) and now devotes his time to helping former addicts get jobs and live a normal life.

For many addicts, weighing up the odds of

exposure to AIDS is not a calculation carried out in the most coherent of circumstances.

An addict's craving for heroin is so overwhelming that worrying over what syringe to use seems a trivial matter.

"All they want is the drug, so they don't care about AIDS or any other diseases for that matter," said Mr Mok's colleague, fellow warden and ex-addict, Mr Cheung.

Disposable hypodermic syringes are available in most chemist shops for \$1 each, yet both Mr Mok and Mr Cheung said it was only the more affluent addicts who regularly bought disposable needles.

"Most addicts use all their money to buy drugs, and they don't care too much about needles," said Mr Mok.

Both men agreed that addicts did not believe they were exposing themselves to a significant risk

of AIDS by sharing syringes.

Because only one AIDS carrier had been discovered among drug-users in Hongkong, the incidence was considered too low to worry about, they said.

However that figure is almost certainly inaccurate, since the majority of addicts have not been tested for AIDS, and would refuse a test if offered one.

Indeed the one known addict carrying AIDS was discovered "by mistake", after he was taken into the care of SARDA.

"A lot of drug addicts know that their futures will not be very good, so they don't care, or don't worry about these things," said Mr Mok.

"What they want is drugs and money — that's all, and they don't care about anything else."