

Aiming for elimination: assessing the effectiveness of hepatitis C point of care testing and incentives to link people to treatment and care in Barwon South West

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INTRODUCTION

- Since 2016, elimination of hepatitis C as a public health threat has been on the global agenda.
- Nationally we need to increase testing to achieve the global elimination targets, and simplifying the diagnostic pathway is key¹.
- Providing patients with financial incentives to engage in hepatitis C testing may be cost effective³.
- Western Victoria, which includes the Barwon South West (BSW) is leading the way as the only Primary Health Network in Australia to achieve the 2022 National Strategy treatment target rate of 65%².
- BSW is aiming for micro-elimination – elimination in the region.

OBJECTIVES

- This intervention in the BSW micro-elimination program uses:
 - Hepatitis C RNA point of care (PoC) tests &
 - Financial incentives
- The objectives are to assess the impact this intervention on:
 - The proportion of people tested and diagnosed with hepatitis C via PoC testing compared to standard testing in BSW region
 - The care cascade (proportion that start treatment, proportion cured), and time to treatment, post PoC test.

METHOD

- The Viral Hepatitis (VH) Outreach Nurse travels throughout the BSW region visiting primary care services
 - Alcohol and Drug Services
 - Needle and Syringe Programs
- Nurse provides hepatitis B and hepatitis C
 - testing, treatment and linkage to care
 - supports local clinicians that provide care to people at risk of viral hepatitis
- HCV RNA PoC testing was introduced as a diagnostic option provided by the VH Outreach Nurse to people who inject drugs (PWID) at recruited sites
 - Requires a **finger prick of blood**
 - Standard venepuncture is often a problem for PWID
- People undergoing venepuncture for hepatitis C treatment work up are provided with a \$20 incentive (gift voucher)
- The PoC intervention will run for 12 months from August 2023
- HREC/99327/VICBH-2023-383852(v2)



RESULTS

- Ethics approval end July 2023
- Staff PoC training July 2023
- Site 1 opened 29 August 2023
- Site 2 opened September 2023
- Site 3 planned to open November 2023
- Current N = 37
 - Cases = 3
 - Engaged in care = 3
- Team insights
 - Role of anonymity in successful city models not possible in regional models, need for work around
- Photo above
 - Team PoC training
 - Loading cartridge into machine
- Photo below
 - A laboratory on wheels, the Cepheid
 - GeneXpert packed up to move



DISCUSSION

- If Australia is to achieve elimination, we cannot assume that the approaches that worked for the first 56% (95,395) people who were willing, waiting and eager to be treated will work for the remaining 44% (120,000) yet to be treated⁴
- Assessment of approaches to engage people who are hesitant, doubtful, uncertain or unaware of hepatitis C are required
- There is clear evidence for embedding treatment within primary care services – addition of PoC testing may be complimentary

CONCLUSION

- To eliminate hepatitis C as a public health threat, collaborative, data-driven interventions that suit our community are required⁵
- Results of this study will identify where and what the role of HCV PoC testing is for our region

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