

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEPATITIS C TREATMENT FOR PEOPLE CURRENTLY INJECTING DRUGS, A SEXUAL HEALTH CLINIC MODEL OF CARE

Authors:

Ryder N^{1,3,4}, Woodward S¹, Voght K¹, Lindsay M²

¹ HNE Sexual Health, Hunter New England Local Health District, NSW,² HIV and Related Programs, Hunter New England Local Health District, NSW,³ School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Newcastle, NSW,³ The Kirby Institute, UNSW, Sydney, NSW

Background:

People who currently inject drugs are a key population for hepatitis C treatment. Cure leads to significant health benefits for the individual and, through reducing transmission, reduces new infections. Pacific Clinic, a sexual health clinic in Newcastle Australia, provides targeted testing and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections for priority populations, including people who inject drugs. With the advent of oral direct acting agents for hepatitis C, Pacific Clinic was able to facilitate treatment for people who may not otherwise engage with the health system. The clinic implemented a model of care to improve access and ensure quality outcomes for people currently injecting drugs.

Description of model of care:

In addition to existing clinic practices that ensure free, non-judgmental and confidential care, the clinic strengthened or enacted the following measures:

- worked with partner services to promote the clinic among people who inject drugs,
- improved the availability of walk-in appointments,
- integrated hepatitis assessment and treatment into general clinic sessions,
- adapted an existing incentivised screening model to incentivise follow-up care, and
- instituted an individualised case management service

Effectiveness:

Between March 2016 and July 2017, 79 clients were prescribed hepatitis C treatment, of which 49 (62%) reported current (within 12 months) injecting drug use. Treatment completion, as defined by collection of medication and/or self-report, was achieved by 71 (90%) of patients, with no difference between people who currently inject drugs and other patients. 54 (96%) of those with data available at the time of analysis showed a sustained viral response, or cure, again with no difference by injecting drug use status.

Conclusion and next steps:

By implementing an evidence based model of care a sexual health clinic successfully provided an effective and targeted hepatitis C treatment service aimed at people who currently inject drugs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No conflict of interests reported