

How the Elimination of a Virus Came to Be: Modelling and the Life of Targets

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Elimination has emerged as a defining moment in efforts to 'end hepatitis C' linked to the promise of pharmaceutical treatments affording curative potential. But how has 'elimination' in relation to hepatitis C come to be? How is viral elimination potential 'evidence-made'? In this paper, we draw on ideas from science and technology studies, to explore how the object of viral elimination has come to be. To do this, we concentrate on tracing the work of two prime actors bringing elimination to life: Mathematical modelling; and global elimination targets. Drawing on analyses of qualitative interview data with experts in hepatitis C elimination science and policy, we investigate how the practices of mathematical modelling and global elimination targets enact promise of elimination potential. Specifically, we treat models and targets as 'futuring practices' to explore how the futures they make have material effects in the present. We unpack the 'evidence-making' processes of how models and targets 'work' in making-up elimination futures. We get inside the 'virtual precision' of modelling and targeting processes to consider how such latitude performs an 'evidence-based' optimism. We make this analysis not to question whether or not viral elimination potential is true, but to stand back and critically appreciate how elimination science does its work. We end with some questions for the field of elimination science, including on the performative roles of models and targets as evidence-making practices.

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