

LINKAGE TO CARE: ADDED VALUE OF C-BUDDIES IN THE TREATMENT OF HEPATITIS C IN PERSONS WHO USE OR INJECT DRUGS

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Background: Direct antiviral agents (DAA) have become standard of care for hepatitis C with short and very effective treatments with negligible side-effect. In PWIDS nevertheless, staging, treatment initiation and adherence to treatment are major hurdles in our fight against the hepatitis C pandemic. Our primary goal is to lower burden of disease on the individual and the society by addressing this population that is most impacted by using a peer-led multidisciplinary approach.

Description of model of care/intervention: By providing educated peers called “C-Buddies” who navigate the patient through the health system on the one hand and implementing HCV screening at our needle and syringe program at Free Clinic on the other hand we breached many of the traditional barriers to treatment. Next to providing support during treatment we also organize a highly personalized follow-up support based on individual needs.

Effectiveness: In our study we report the outcome of 196 patients linked to care via the C-Buddies. We will be proud to present our very favorable results with more than 95% of patients reaching sustained virological response (SVR). Secondly we investigate multiple social factors (insurance, housing, education, safe drug use et cetera) which may have an important impact on adherence and final outcome.

Conclusion and next steps: Our model of care has proven his efficacy for this fragile patient population and can be used in a broader context to optimize its implementation. In real world every setting needs its own approach but we believe our model in his different aspects can be implemented because of its strong personal engagement needed for treatment adherence in an era where almost perfect treatment is available.

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