HEPATITIS B POP-UP SCREENING AT UNSW - WAS IT ALL WORTH IT?

BACKGROUND

People from countries with elevated hepatitis B prevalence are at increased risk of chronic infection, but may have limited awareness of viral hepatitis and its implications; as well as inadequate access to testing in their home countries. While in Australia, they may be reluctant to present for health care due to difficulties navigating the system and/or concerns around stigma. University campuses present a unique opportunity to target large numbers of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

METHODS

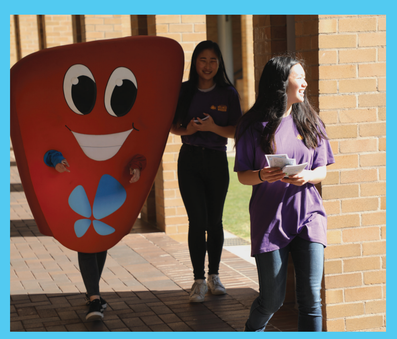
A partnership was established between SESLHD health promotion staff, the UNSW Health Service, Student Development International, Arc Student Services and Hepatitis NSW. Partners worked together to plan, promote and host an on-campus "healthy liver" stall, with the objective of targeting CALD students for Fibroscans and hepatitis B screening. To avoid the risk of stigmatising particular population groups, promotional materials specified neither the target population nor the relevant health issue. A range of educational engagement activities were offered, with participation incentivised by the chance to win substantial prizes including a $200 UNSW Bookshop voucher.

RESULTS

Within a five-hour period, 93 students - more than 90% of whom were from CALD backgrounds, and particularly high prevalence Asian countries including China - were screened for viral hepatitis; while 41 students undertook a Fibroscan. Provision of testing both free of charge and on-campus were key factors in students' willingness to undertake testing. Although just one active hepatitis B infection was detected, a total of 35 students were identified as susceptible to either hepatitis A, hepatitis B or both; while a further 14 students returned abnormal liver function tests. With clinical governance provided by the UNSW Health Service, all students were referred to the Service to receive their results. Through these means, many students who had not previously accessed the Health Service were linked in, providing opportunities for additional health education and interventions while living in Australia.

CONCLUSION

This successful event, in which a large number of individuals from a population specified as a priority in the NSW Hepatitis B Strategy 2014-2020 were educated about and screened for viral hepatitis, relied on a partnership involving multiple organisations, each able to make key contributions to the event. Although community-based screening programs clearly rely on the capacity of clinical services, to afford such events a credibility that they may otherwise struggle to establish, it is imperative to involve organisations already known to and trusted by target populations.



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