

HCV KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS AMONG INJECTING DRUG USERS IN THE DIRECT ACTING ANTIVIRALS ERA

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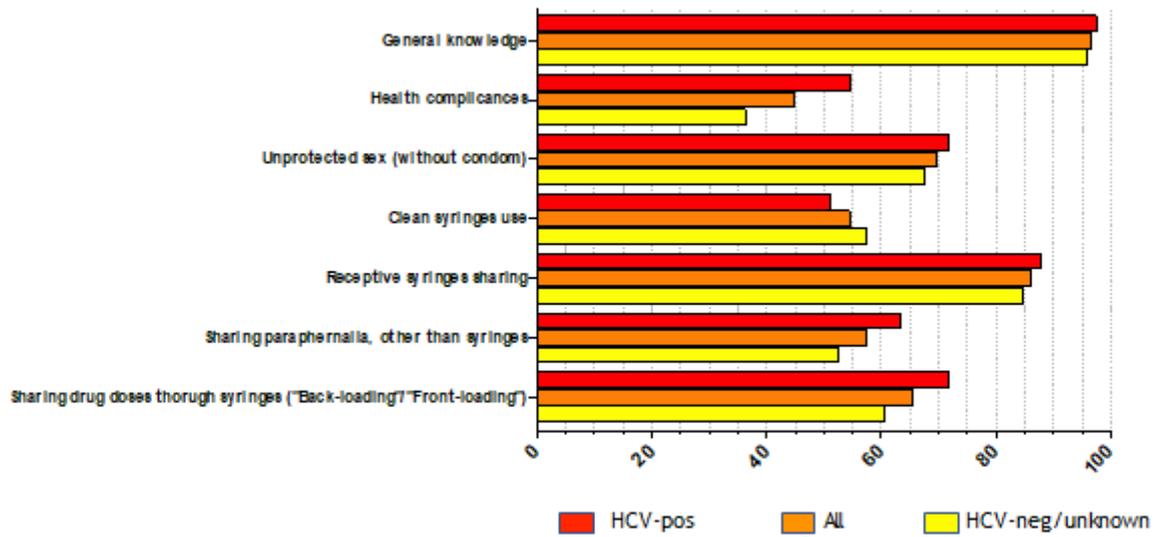
Background: We investigated the knowledge of HCV transmission-related behaviours in PWID admitted in a therapeutic Community to understand better why HCV prevalence remains high, even in those who deny sharing syringes.

Methods: From January-2018 to December-2019, trained interviewers administered a face-to-face interview to PWID at admission in San Patrignano (Italy) TC, focusing on knowledge of transmission pathway and long term effects of HCV-infection, according their HCV status knowledge (HCVAb-pos vs. HCVAb-neg/unknown).

Results: 181/232 PWID (78%) adhered to the study: 75.7% males, median age 20 years (IQR: 18-25) at first drug injection and 31 years (IQR: 24-37) at TC-admission. 120 (66.3%) were heroin and cocaine injectors, 45 (24.9%) heroin only and 16 cocaine only (8.8%). HCV Ab prevalence was 50.9% in those who denied receptive sharing of syringes (106 individuals) and 80% in those who admitted it but only with intimate partner or trusty friends (75). Three persons were HIV-pos (1.7%) all of them related to sexual transmission. 82 individuals were already aware of being HCVAb-pos at TC-admission (45.3%), while among the remaining 99, 42 were previously screened resulting HCVAb-neg and 57 were never screened before. Knowledge of HCV-related diseases was statistically higher among HCVAb-pos ($p < 0.001$). There were large gaps in HCV knowledge, only marginally lower in those aware of being HCVAb-pos (Fig 1). In particular some injecting-related practices, like dividing doses through syringes and paraphernalia (other than syringes) sharing, proven as risky for HCV transmission, were not sufficiently recognized as dangerous by our PWID population.

Conclusion: Even if in recent years most of PWID avoid sharing of syringes, or share only with intimate partner or trusty friend, HCV prevalence remains high in this population, whereas HIV diffusion is ending. Accurate HCV information is failing to reach PWID, and/or they may not value the little information they do receive.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Supported by: Grant Gilead IN-IT- 987-5396, part of the LEGA-C™ program.



* paraphernalia other than syringes: cookers, rinse water, cotton filters, etc.