Prioritised annual hepatitis C testing drives in drug recovery services show acceptability and effectiveness of testing

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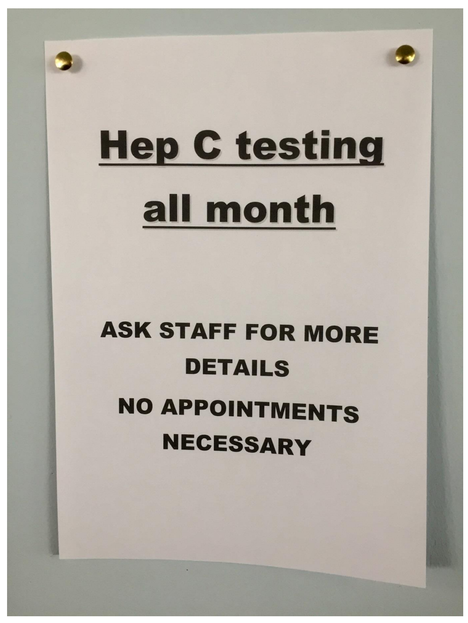
Background

As part of the implementation of the Scottish Hepatitis C Action Plan, Hepatitis C (HCV) testing was embedded as an intervention in Glasgow Alcohol and Drug Recovery Services (GADRS). Staff were trained and Dry Blood Spot (DBS) tests were made widely available. Despite these measures, uptake remained low.

In 2015, an audit in South West Care and Treatment (SWCAT) team opiate substitution therapy (OST) clinics found only 15% of patients had been tested for HCV within the previous 12 months.

A new approach was required to address the low uptake in the OST clinic patients an effective and sustainable way, in order to significantly increase not only detection of HCV, but treatment and prevention of spread.

Methods

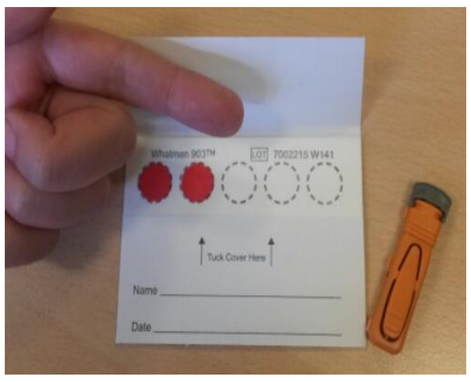


Awareness campaign

- Poster campaign in OST clinic premises
- Integrated SWCAT staff team briefed (admin, social care, nursing, medical)
- Dialogue between patients and staff around HCV, new treatments and reducing stigma

Testing

- Prioritised annual testing month identified
- Targeted approach by staff promoting tests and raising awareness
- Opt out testing adopted
- Instant access to DBS testing for all patients
- Consistent medical support to staff and patients



Results

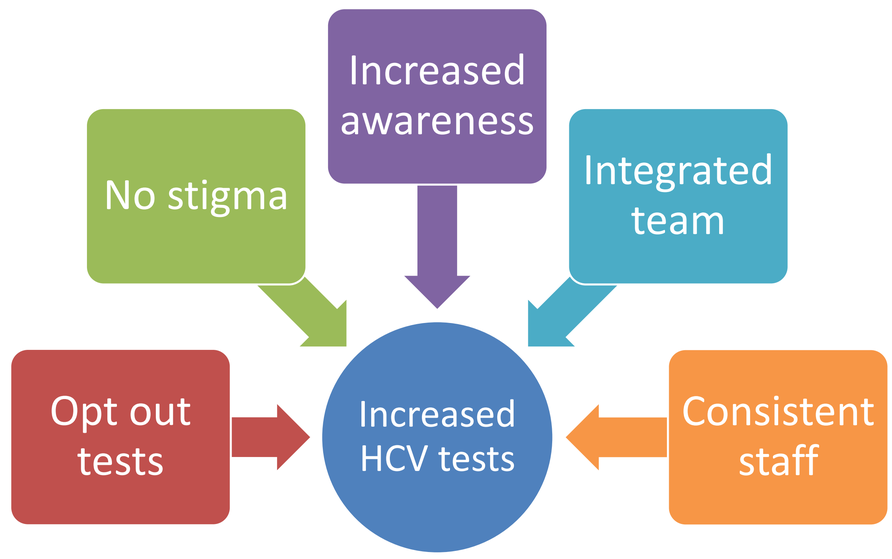
Year	Attended during testing period	Tested	Refused	Acceptance rate (%)
2015	148	146	2	98.6
2016	172	172	0	100
2017	172	169	3	98.2

Over the three years, a total of 303 patients were HCV tested. Of 172 tested in 2017, 99 (57.5%) attended SWCAT during either previous testing period, with 98 (99%) accepting retest in 2017. Of 172 tested in 2016, 125 (73.8%) have had an additional test during either the 2015 or 2017 testing periods

95 (31.4%) patients were diagnosed with active HCV infection and referred for follow up as necessary.

Discussion

There are a variety of factors which could have potentially influenced such a positive result, with the overall effect likely being multifactorial:



Conclusions

Annual opt out HCV testing offered in this way is both highly acceptable and effective in the OST clinic setting. Annual testing at SWCAT will continue with aim of identifying new infections and importantly monitor reinfection rate for treated patients post SVR. The approach will be rolled out to all community teams.

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References

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- World Health Organisation. Combating Hepatitis B and C to reach elimination by 2030. May 2016.