

**A PERFECT STORM & A PERFECT OPPORTUNITY:
THE STORY OF AN INNOVATIVE HCV SCREENING AND LTC PROGRAM FOR SUBSTANCE USERS IN
GEORGIA**

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Background:

Imagine Hope has managed HIV testing on behalf of Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health/Office of Addictive Disease since 1996; testing nearly 200,000 individuals for HIV over the past two decades. In response to long-standing client requests and in partnership with Gilead Sciences' FOCUS project Imagine Hope began offering HCV testing and linkage in tandem with HIV testing in March 2015.

Description of model of care/intervention:

HCV screening and linkage was integrated with an existing robust HIV testing program. Starting with 5 partner clinics in 2015, HCV screening is now conducted in 31 substance use and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) facilities. Individuals testing HCV antibody positive (Ab+) receive RNA confirmatory testing, with an emphasis on linking newly identified HCV+ individuals to education, care, and treatment through dedicated linkage coordinators. Additionally, Imagine Hope's capacity building efforts enabled 2 MAT programs to integrate HCV treatment into their opioid use treatment services.

Effectiveness:

HIV sero-prevalence rates have remained well under 1% annually. However, from April 2015-December 2108 of the 27,401 individuals that were tested for HCV in 31 clinics across Georgia, 10.5% (2,882) tested HCV Ab+, and 70.6% (1972) were confirmed to be HCV RNA positive. Of those HCV RNA+, 67.8% (1338) were linked to care. Of note 78.9% (1364) of HCV RNA+ clients were outside of the baby boomer cohort.

Conclusion and next steps:

Implementation of HCV testing and linkage to care in tandem with an HIV testing embedded in substance use and MAT programs provides an example of how the consequences of growing opioid epidemic can best be addressed in individuals with substance use diagnoses. Plans are underway to expand HCV screening and linkage services 10 additional clinics.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Imagine Hope receives funding from the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities and Gilead Sciences FOCUS project.