

Supporting GPs to increase confidence in testing and treating Hepatitis C

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Background:

Many general practitioners (GP) report limited knowledge and confidence around testing and treating patients for hepatitis C (HCV). As GPs play a central role in HCV care, workforce capacity building and upskilling are critical. To help understand and better support GPs to increase testing and treating for HCV, a qualitative research study was conducted to assess the different perspectives and experiences of GPs in metropolitan vs regional NSW settings.

Approach:

Two focus groups of 90 minutes were held with GPs across metropolitan and regional NSW.

Outcome/Results

The focus groups identified that there is a perception amongst GPs that a stereotypical HCV patient is a person who has an obvious history of drug use, incarceration or engages in high-risk sexual behaviours. Other risk factors including tattoos and ethnicity are often overlooked, creating a perception that HCV prevalence is uncommon in GP settings. Multiple barriers to testing were identified, including no rapport with new patients to raise the topic of testing, no obvious HCV risks, time constraints, different and confusing laboratory approaches to RNA testing and unfamiliarity of additional tests available (e.g., Fibroscan, APRI). Few GPs reported prescribing treatment due to the abundance of specialists available. A specialist is seen as the preferred option in terms of best use of a GPs time, however risk of loss to follow up may increase as a result of this.

Conclusions/Applications:

The focus groups identified a significant gap in GP knowledge around HCV testing and treatment. GPs were seeking a “shared care” approach with specialists when it comes to treating HCV. Many felt comfortable dispensing and monitoring patients with the support of a specialist. Education and support from specialists reduce unreasonable and daunting expectations that GPs feel when treating HCV positive patients, such as keeping up to date with new HCV treatment information and processes.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

NSW Health funds RACGP to undertake research and training activities for GPs in NSW. NSW Health recognise and acknowledge the work of RACGP and ACA Research in leading the research activities in this qualitative research study. NSW Health also thank all GP participants for their time and involvement in this study.