

HEPFRIEND: PEER SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS WITH HEPATITIS C IN THE UK, IRELAND, ROMANIA AND SPAIN AS PART OF THE HEP CARE PROGRAMME

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Background:

Peers support workers (PSWs), with their lived experience, can connect with underserved populations with hepatitis C (HCV) in a way traditional treatment services cannot. PSWs can help their clients through the treatment pathway, but more importantly can assume some of the roles within that pathway therefore removing some of the barriers to a life unaffected with HCV. HepCare is a European Commission programme across four countries: Ireland, UK, Spain, Romania. The HepFriend work package aims to up-skill PSWs in the community to increase awareness and testing of HCV, provide linkage to care and treatment support.

Approach:

All sites receive training from the Hepatitis C Trust in how to develop their own peer network's needs. In London PSWs already worked alongside the Find&Treat mobile health unit for the homeless across the city. Training was given in point-of-care tests (POCTs) for HCV, DBS testing and Fibroscan. Linkage to care, via peer accompanied appointments and treatment support, was offered to all chronically infected individuals. Dublin, Sevilla and Bucharest had less developed HCV peer networks. Links were made with a local NGO and PSWs trained to give awareness sessions. Peers were trained to use POCTs in various settings such as drug treatment services and prisons.

Outcome:

To date a total of 395 individuals were given HCV awareness information, 204 were tested and 132 were helped to engage with specialist services. So far 33% have either completed or are in treatment.

Conclusion:

Peers are a powerful resource in reaching populations at risk of HCV. The experience of the London site will help guide practice for the other sites, especially in further training of peers to take on more clinical skills such as Fibroscan and DBS testing. Follow-up data will inform a cost effectiveness evaluation later this year.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Non declared.