

EXPERTC, A PILOT IN BUILDING A CARE CASCADE FROM THE GROUND UP

Windelinckx T¹, dr. Verlinden W², dr. Schouten J³, dr. Matheï C⁴.

¹ Ngo Free Clinic Belgium, ² AZ Nikolaas, Belgium, ³ AZ Nikolaas, Belgium, ⁴ Ngo Free Clinic and KULeuven Belgium

Background:

Despite the existence of evidence-based interventions targeting steps along the HCV (HepatitisC virus) care continuum, diagnosis and especially treatment uptake among People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) remain suboptimal among PWUD in Flanders, Belgium. The existing good practices remain largely operational on a local level -often under the impulse of a few dedicated individuals-leading to large inequalities in the access to HCV care across the country.

The goal of this project is to test and optimize methods to increase HCV awareness, diagnosis and linkage to care of PWUD and to transfer knowledge adapted to local needs to facilities involved in care of PWUD.

Approach:

In January 2018 we established a pilot 'ExpertC' in Sint-Niklaas, a small regional city in Belgium with a history of injecting drug use. The first part of the project consists of an assessment of the current situation and the identification of local needs by interviewing PWUD, GP's and social workers. The second part is to bring this into practice. Once a week PWUD are contacted through outreach work, are screened through a finger prick test for HCV antibodies. When positive a standard blood test is performed, followed two weeks later by liver elastography and consultation at the hepatology clinic. Before patients are screened, they are fully aware of all the next steps.

Outcome:

Preliminary results show that 4 months after the start of the project 20 PWUD were screened with a finger prick test and 6 were subsequently screened by blood sampling. Two persons already started treatment.

Conclusion:

In this pilot-project it was shown that in return for limited investments in time and resources, existing networks can be engaged to take up their role in bridging the local HCV care continuum. This way we hope to close the regional gaps in the provision of HCV care for PWUD in Belgium.

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Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of

¹ Ngo Free Clinic Belgium

² AZ Nikolaas, Belgium

³ AZ Nikolaas, Belgium

⁴ Ngo Free Clinic and KULeuven Belgium

disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.