

# Model Addressing Hepatitis C

## An Epidemic That Impacts People Who Inject Drugs (PWID)

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### BACKGROUND

The **Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group** was founded by a patient to address the lack of education and supportive services for people living with Hepatitis C and co-infected with HIV through drug use. This includes helping Healthcare Providers to better understand how to work with all patients from high risk and underserved populations from a non-clinical perspective.



### METHOD

**THE CIRCLE** helps HCMSG address the basic needs of all people affected by Hepatitis C and those co-infected with HIV. We encourage each person to be tested for Hepatitis C in response to what is clearly a connection between the use of injection drugs and Hepatitis C. The participants who test positive are then navigated through the system with the goal of receiving treatment for Hepatitis C and to endeavor to reduce the harm using The Hepatitis C Education and Support Group Assistance Program. The clients are identified through programs such as **Syringe Exchange Circle** programs in a non-hostile environment where they are provided with hygiene safety kits to reduce the harm of infection and to encourage a healthy lifestyle. There is no judgment of lifestyle in the syringe exchange program and participants are treated with respect encouraging them to make healthy choices.

**There is a generation of young people who have become infected with Hepatitis C through injecting opiates and sharing syringes.** Education in regard to transmission is necessary for this population in a non-judgmental environment. Using HCMSG's mission and goals, we provide insight and direction into providing and developing an effective The Circle program before and after treatment for this particular patient population.



#### Why Circle?

Aside from the physical formation of the group, the idea of a Circle gives people a sense of belonging in an environment without judgement.

### MODELS OF CARE

The **Hepatitis C Education and Support Group Assistance Program** was established to provide resources, trainings and supportive services nationwide. These services are performed in hospitals, clinics, and various other organizations, such as those focused on co-infection with HIV, people who currently use or formerly used drugs, youth and young adults, the LGBTQ community, and women of child bearing age. Our services are available to staff, patients, and health care providers at no cost.

#### **The services includes:**

- Training and training materials on group meeting facilitation, education on Hepatitis C, co-infection with HIV, Harm reduction strategies, and the importance of advocacy.
  - \* **Support in forming educational groups surrounding syringe exchange programs**
  - \* Training available in video format
- Working with the staffs of HIV organizations to integrate Hepatitis C and Harm Reduction education into their programs.
  - \* Meet with organization's patients to help educate them on co-infection.
- An informational website ([www.hepatitisCmsg.org](http://www.hepatitisCmsg.org)), award winning blog, and social media updates.
- HCMSG Patient Support Newsletter is geared to help patients, including questions to ask medical providers, definitions of medical terms, provides resources such as patient assistance programs, and the latest information on treatments.
- Tele-Support - The same training as above only provided via conference call.
  - \* This fills various needs such as trainings for facilitators and support groups for patients in areas where there is no support and education available.



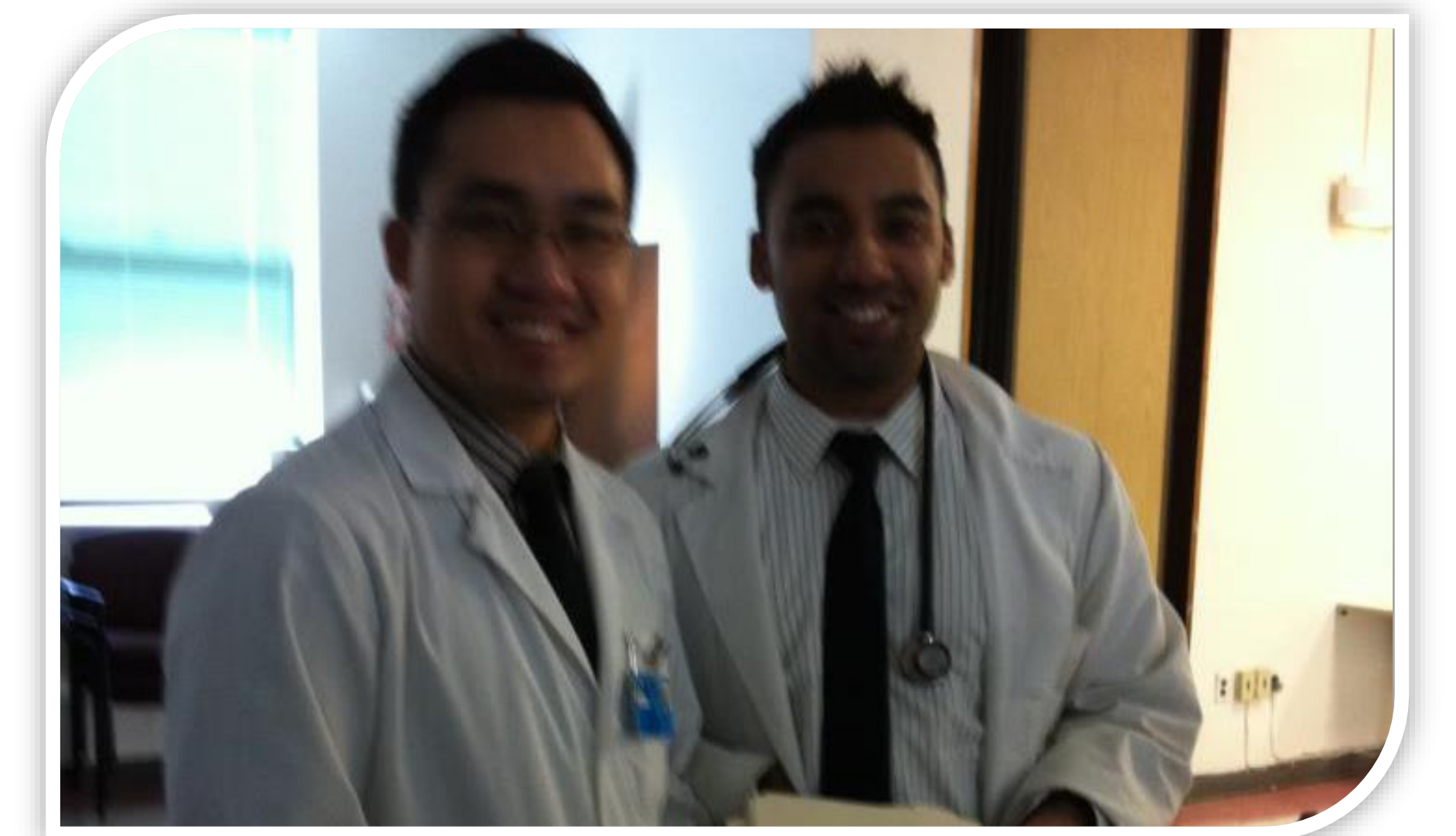
### EFFECTIVENESS

Educational groups and supportive patient mentoring services have been shown to be important elements of successful and cost effective medical care for patients with Hepatitis C and other chronic health conditions. These services improve the quality of life, as well as better health outcomes for individual patients.

**The program has succeeded in motivating patients to seek treatment and adhere to it.** In many cases, it has helped to reduce feelings of stigma, helping people to feel worthy. Empowering them to be in charge of their own health. In some cases, we have found patients re-examining their life choices in regards to drug use. We have extended our services to healthcare providers to educate them about best practices when working with diverse patient populations. To date, **HCMSG has trained over 1,000 facilitators**, who have in turn touched tens of thousands of lives across the United States.

### Health Care Providers Training

We encourage healthcare providers to provide information about Hepatitis C to all of their patients and make sure they ask them if they have been tested. This training is designed to help the provider better understand how to work with all patients infected with or at risk for Hepatitis C, such as those who currently use or formerly used drugs, members of the LGBTQ community, youth and young adults, women of child bearing age, and those co-infected with HIV. While other Hepatitis C trainings exist, the perspective they provide is from that of the clinician, leaving the patient feeling disconnected, misunderstood and stigmatized. HCMSG comes directly from the experiences of a patient who was cured of Hepatitis C and a mother who lost her son to overdose.



#### What type of provider should attend?

Any clinician who treats or wants to treat patients with Hepatitis C, in any type of setting, including:

- GI
- Infectious disease (HIV/AIDS)
- Primary care, IM
- Liver specialist

#### How is the training structured?

Tailored to fit each organization and individual as needed.

#### This Training Provides:

- Learning about Hepatitis C and co-infection with HIV, and how the diseases affect your patients and your practice.
- Recognizing the impact social determinants of health have on different communities.
- Helping patients manage their health, as well as their emotional and non-medical issues.
- Identifying stigma and negative stereotypes used in your practice, understanding the negative impact they have on the clinical outcomes of your patients, and learning how to eliminate them.
- Understanding why and how patients who do not abstain from drug or alcohol use can and should be treated for Hepatitis C.
- Explaining ways for helping patients understand the transmission risks of injection drug use and learn effective harm reduction strategies.
- Identifying best practices for effectively working with high risk populations.
- Empowering patients to be in charge of their own health, resulting in better health outcomes.

### CONCLUSIONS

Community based organizations are able to make an impact with patients and providers. These programs provide the knowledge and tools to enable participants to continue this work in their various communities

### SUPPORT

Support for these programs provided by Gilead Sciences Inc., AbbVie Inc., Merck & Co Inc.