

HOW DO WE REACH THE OTHER 75% OF PEOPLE WITH UNTREATED CHRONIC HEPATITIS C IN AUSTRALIA?

Myers L¹, Reid K², Angela Corry¹, Jeffery P¹, Kyron M²

¹Peer Based Harm Reduction WA, ²University of Western Australia

Background:

Connecting with people who inject drugs requires a tailored approach. In Australia, hepatitis C treatment uptake remains low. A collaborative study between Peer Based Harm Reduction WA (PBHRWA) and the University of Western Australia (UWA) was conducted during 2017 and 2018. The overall purpose of this component of the study was to measure changes in at-risk behavior, changes in quality of life and to ascertain the barriers and enablers of engaging with consumers.

Methods:

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from UWA. The first part of the project included a retrospective audit of 1064 clinical files. The second part of the project, a prospective study recruited hepatitis C positive consumers interested in undertaking hepatitis C treatment.

Results:

Retrospective Audit: The clinic was attended by even numbers of males and females. Eighty percent of the health clinic clientele report they had a previous psychiatric history. Eighty-two percent of clients attending the clinic were current injecting drug users. Fifty-four percent of those who inject use amphetamines. Twenty-five percent of the sample was hepatitis C antibody positive.

Prospective Study: To date, twelve clients have completed the final hepatitis C treatment visit and all have achieved viral clearance. A focus group of treatment participants highlighted the issue that normal modes of communication such as radio and conventional advertising may not be the most effective way of informing people who inject drugs.

Conclusion:

As a NSEP and at the forefront of engagement with injecting drug users, understanding the complexities of this marginalized population is of the utmost importance and will assist PBHRWA in identifying new and innovative approaches in client engagement. Increasing client engagement will assist in identifying previously unknown hepatitis infections whilst offering hepatitis C treatment and harm reduction strategies will contribute to reducing the infection and transmission of hepatitis C.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Leanne Myers has the following disclosures of interest to declare:

- MSD – Advisory Board 2017 – payment received
- Abbvie – Advisory Board 2017 – payment received