

ENGAGING THE DISENGAGED: HCV SELF TESTING AND LINKAGE TO CARE FOR DRUG TREATMENT SERVICE USERS DURING COVID

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Background:

Self-testing is validated for HIV with evidence for increased uptake, comparable linkage to care and an absence of harm in at risk individuals. However, there is limited data on this strategy for HCV infection (WHO 2021).

During COVID, most clinics moved to telephone consultations, reducing opportunities for BBV screening. This project targeted patients with >12 months follow up for reengagement testing through supported home self-testing for HCV with rapid linkage to care

Description of model of care/intervention:

Interrogation of patient records identified target populations of older clients (>45years) who had not previously been tested. Exclusion criteria: previous positive HCV Ab result, prior treatment, negative DBS test within 6 months. Telephone contact was made to gain consent for participation.

Participants received a postal testing pack including bespoke patient information leaflet and Oraquick® point of care test. A dedicated phone was used to discuss results and deliver support. Positive HCV Ab tests triggered urgent assessment by Hepatology nurses supported by Hep C Trust peers.

Effectiveness:

Preliminary results (full completion May 2022). 210 people participated and received home HCV self-test kits. 92 reported test results (44% of postal tests dispatched). 6 HCV Ab+, 80 HCVAb-, 6 test failures. 6.5% of completed tests detected HCVAb.

Of the 6 HCVAb+, 5 attended for confirmatory PCR. Two were PCR negative (spontaneous clearance), two PCR positive patients commenced treatment and one awaits additional diagnostics. The strength of ODN linkage to care is reflected in the pathway, including two patients who were subsequently incarcerated and followed up by the prison in reach team.

Conclusion and next steps:

Postal testing for HCV using rapid point of care tests is feasible, providing opportunities to engage individuals at past or current risk. Once engaged linkage to care was effective, providing useful avenues for HCV diagnosis and treatment during the pandemic.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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