

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES IN HEPATITIS C CARE ENGAGEMENT: THE INTERWOVEN EXTRINSIC AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS ALONG THE CARE CASCADE, A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Background: We must treat people who use drugs (PWUD) with hepatitis C (HCV) to reach elimination targets, yet these individuals are often difficult to engage in screening and treatment. Financial incentives for HCV care have been proposed to increase screening rates, though little is known about the impact of incentives upon motivating factors throughout the care cascade. We performed a qualitative analysis of PWUD incentivized for screening and sustained virologic response (SVR12) to assess the impact of incentives on motivation and engagement.

Methods: Between August, 2022 and January, 2023, we conducted in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with PWUDs in Portland, Oregon undergoing screening and treatment for HCV at an HCV elimination program. A purposive sample of 30 participants ≥ 18 years old who had screened for HCV with a positive RNA were selected based on incentive participation and treatment initiation. Interviews were transcribed, and dual-coded using inductive and deductive techniques. We analyzed coded data at the semantic level for emergent themes.

Results: Participants described a range of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. Generally, motivation shifted from extrinsic to intrinsic as participants progressed along the care cascade. At screening, many were “caught” by the incentive or “empathetic and endearing” staff approach and feelings of interconnectedness. At later cascade stages, themes such as “pride,” self-worth, improving health, and “just wanting it gone” predominated. At SVR12, extrinsic motivators like incentives re-emerged, alongside persistent intrinsic desires for a sense of closure.

Conclusion: Financial incentives may play an important role in initial engagement with the HCV care cascade, alongside other extrinsic motivators like loving and non-judgmental program staff. Later in the cascade, the development of intrinsic motivation for the cure, both spontaneous and elicited, becomes more central. These findings could help develop more nuanced interventions to test, treat, and cure hard-to-reach PWUD with HCV to reach elimination.

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