RECEIVING HEPATITIS C TREATMENT AS A COUPLE: ROMANTIC PARTNERS' MUTUAL REDUCTION OF INJECTING BEHAVIOUR FREQUENCY.

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Background:
Injecting behaviour in people who inject drugs (PWID) is the main risk factor for hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection. Psychosocial factors such as having a partner who injects drugs and living with other drug users have been associated with increases in injecting risk behaviour. This study aimed to investigate injecting behaviour changes during treatment for HCV infection whilst exploring the role of psychosocial factors on patients' injecting behaviour.

Methods:
Eradicate-C was a single centred clinical trial (ISRCTN27564683) investigating the effectiveness of HCV treatment among PWID between 2012 and 2016. A total of 94 participants completed up to 24 weeks of treatment, with social and behavioural measures taken at different intervals throughout treatment. Data for 84 participants was analysed retrospectively to explore mechanisms of potential behavioural changes which had occurred during treatment.

Results:
Injecting frequency reduced significantly between baseline (week 1) and every 4-weekly intervals until week 26. Not being on Opiate Substitution Therapy (OST) was associated with a statistically significant decrease in injecting frequency, $\chi^2(1)= 10.412$, $p= .001$, as was having a partner who also used drugs, in particular when that partner was also on treatment for HCV infection, $Z= -2.312$, $p=.021$.

Conclusion:
Treating a 'chaotic' population for HCV infection is not only possible, but also bears health benefits beyond treatment of HCV alone. PWID not on OST benefited from HCV treatment by also reducing their weekly injecting frequency. This suggests possible benefits of therapeutic alliance for those not engaging with other health services. In addition, enrolling couples on HCV treatment when partners are sero-concordant, has also shown enhanced benefits for patients' health, by reducing injecting behaviour frequency. A transformation of individual motivation to relationship-focused motivation allows communal coping to impact behaviour through outcome and couple efficacy. These findings have direct implications for practice.

Disclosure of Interest Statement
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