¡DALE! ¡VALE!: TRACKING THE HCV EPIDEMIC IN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN NEW MEXICO

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Background:
Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection rates in young adult people who inject drugs (PWID) are skyrocketing in non-urban areas across the United States. The *Vale!* Study aims to fill knowledge gaps of HCV epidemiology in young adult PWID (aged 18-29) in non-urban New Mexico. Little data is available on HCV prevention and service uptake for this population, making it difficult to know where the gaps are in effectively promoting HCV treatment and prevention.

Methods:
At baseline, information on demographics, injection history and HCV-associated risk factors is collected. Testing for HCV antibodies (anti-HCV) and HCV Recombinant Nucleic Acid (RNA) is conducted. HCV RNA-positive individuals are linked to local providers for HCV treatment and followed to determine ability to enter care, obtain treatment and achieve sustained virologic response. HCV RNA negative participants are followed for one year with quarterly visits.

Results:
Of 166 participants enrolled, 144 participants have received an anti-HCV and a qualitative RNA test through the study; 57% are anti-HCV-positive, 44% have detectable HCV RNA. Acute HCV has been detected in 8 (6%) participants. 33% of patients exposed to HCV have evidence of resolved infection. 55% of participants report receptive needle sharing. 62% report sharing ancillary injection equipment. 77% report utilizing a syringe exchange program. Two participants report having previously received treatment for HCV infection. 34% of participants with HCV RNA have completed an initial intake appointment for HCV treatment. 3 have initiated treatment, 1 has completed and achieved SVR.

Conclusion:
Preliminary results show high proportions of young adult PWID are exposed and infected with HCV in New Mexico. Harm reduction services are widely utilized. Linkage to HCV treatment has been slower with low uptake by participants. These data are expected to inform efforts to provide effective treatment and prevention services to this population.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:
This study was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (award number 5U18PS004568-03; PI: Page, K.). Additional funding for personnel and study supplies was provided by Gilead Sciences, Inc. Funding agencies did not participate in treatment decisions or manuscript preparation. The study also received programmatic and logistical support from the University of New Mexico (UNM) Clinical and Translational Sciences Center (National Institutes of Health award number 1 ULTR001449; PI: Larson R.), Project ECHO®, Creative Testing Solutions©, the New Mexico Department of Health, the Santa Fe Mountain Center, and the Molecular Epidemiology Laboratory in the UNM Health Sciences Center, Division of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Preventive Medicine.