

# A PILOT PROGRAM OF SCREENING AND LINKAGE TO CARE FOR HEPATITIS C IN A GREEK PRISON

Sypsa V,<sup>1</sup> Kalamitsis G<sup>2</sup>, Papatheodoridis G<sup>3</sup>, Georgoulas S<sup>4</sup>, Psychogiou M<sup>5</sup>, Paraskevis D<sup>1</sup>, Dragassaki M<sup>6</sup>, Haikalis S<sup>6</sup>, Malekian H<sup>2</sup>, Roussos S<sup>1</sup>, Daikos G<sup>5</sup>, Hatzakis A<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dept. of Hygiene, Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, <sup>2</sup>Hellenic Liver Patient Association "Prometheus", Greece, <sup>3</sup>Department of Gastroenterology, Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, <sup>4</sup> Korydallos Prison Hospital "Agios Pavlos", Athens, Greece, <sup>5</sup> First Department of Medicine, Medical School, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, <sup>6</sup> Hellenic Scientific Society for the Study of AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Athens, Greece

## Background

In Greece, current eligibility criteria for treatment of chronic hepatitis C patients with Direct Acting Antivirals (DAAs) include fibrosis score  $\geq 7.0$  kPa or HCV/HIV coinfection. Anti-HCV prevalence in PWID is high (86% among those accessing OST programs in Athens in 2015)<sup>1</sup>. In addition, PWID constitute a large proportion of the prisoner population in Greece (Box 1).

However, there are no recent data on HCV burden neither an established procedure for HCV screening/linkage to care in Greek prisons.

A pilot program was implemented in a prison in Athens with the following aims:

### Main Aims of the pilot program in a Greek prison

1. To offer screening for hepatitis C/B, HIV and tuberculosis in a major Greek prison
2. To assess liver fibrosis in PWID & to offer complete HCV/HBV laboratory testing to those diagnosed with significant fibrosis
3. To facilitate linkage to HCV care and treatment

### Box 1. Prisons and drug use in Greece

- In total **33 prisons** in Greece (10,011 prisoners, occupancy: 103.7%)
- The largest prison: **Korydallos** in Athens (1,599 prisoners, occupancy level: 114.5%)
- As a result of the recent drug law: **Decline in the % of prisoners held on drug charges from 45% in 2007 → to 22% in 2018**

(Source: Ministry of Justice, 2018)<sup>2</sup>

**Time period:** October 2017 – March 2018

**Target population:**

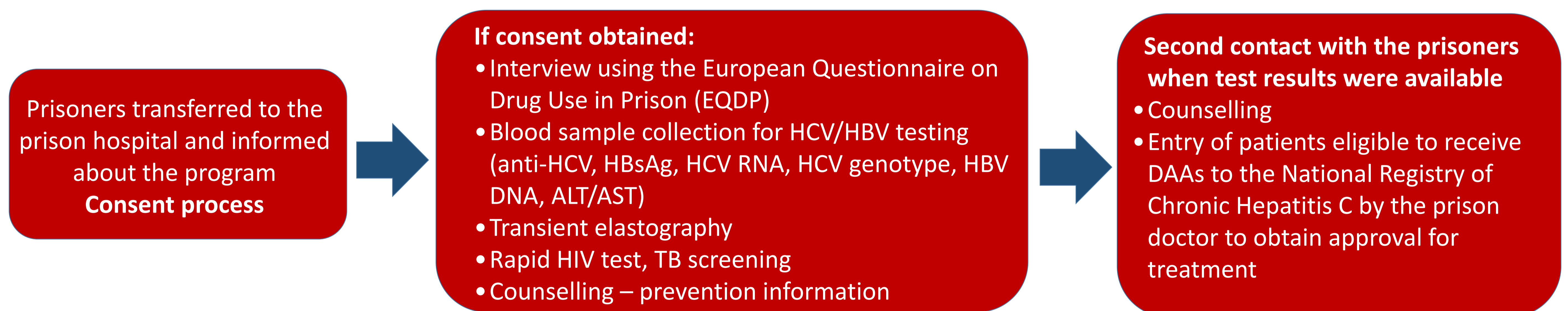
Korydallos prison  
(~1600 prisoners)

Korydallos prison hospital  
(~170 prisoners, the majority with HIV infection)

→ Aim to recruit **500 prisoners** with priority to those awaiting trial/convicted for drug-related offences

## Description of the intervention

A team consisting of a physician and a psychologist visited the prison hospital on a daily basis along accompanied by a person from the Hellenic Liver Patient Association "Prometheus" with a mobile fibroscan device. The process was as follows:

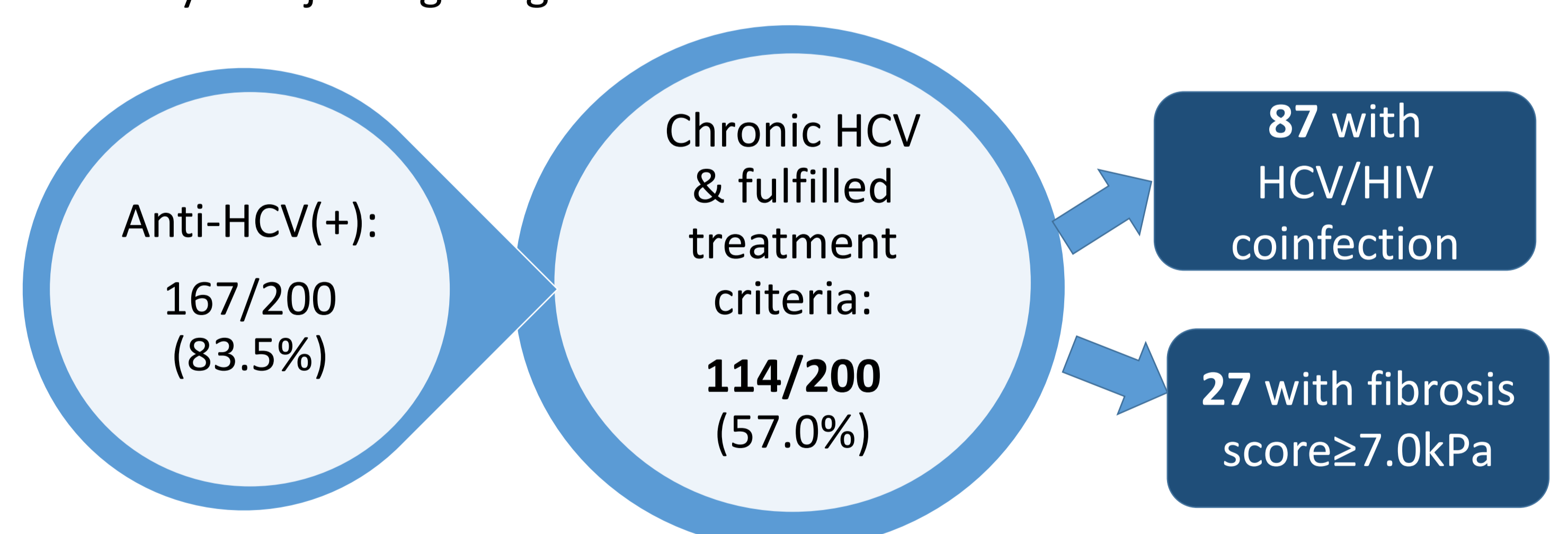


## Results

Out of 329 prisoners enrolled to the program, 200 prisoners reported history of injecting drug use.

**Table 1. Characteristics of imprisoned PWID (N=200)**

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Age (years), mean (SD)                            | 39 (8)      |
| Male gender, n(%)                                 | 187 (93.5%) |
| Drug-related offence (current imprisonment), n(%) | 58 (29%)    |
| Greek nationality, n(%)                           | 146 (73%)   |
| Injecting in prison (any imprisonment), n(%)      | 56 (28%)    |



Out of 167 anti-HCV(+) imprisoned PWID:

- 57.5% reported that they were already diagnosed
- 7.8% reported that they had received HCV treatment in the past

### References:

1. Greek Documentation and Monitoring Centre for Drugs. Annual report. 2017 (<http://www.ektepn.gr/Documents/PDF/EE2016.pdf>) [in Greek]
2. Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights. Statistical data on detainees (<http://www.ministryofjustice.gr>)

**Funding:** The program was funded by Gilead Europe.

**Acknowledgments:** We thank all participants, the Director of Korydallos Prison Hospital (M. Stefi) and the Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights.

**Contact information:** Vana Sypsa ([vsipsa@med.uoa.gr](mailto:vsipsa@med.uoa.gr))

## Conclusion and next steps

- Despite the existing restrictions on access to DAAs in Greece, the program identified a large number of imprisoned PWID eligible for treatment. At the time this poster was prepared, there was a decision to remove reimbursement restrictions based on fibrosis stage.
- The program was successful in overcoming barriers in screening and subsequent linkage to treatment (lack of fibroscan, cost of HCV RNA/genotype) & provided all the necessary information to enter patients to the National Registry of Chronic Hepatitis C and request approval for free treatment with DAAs.
- Several other barriers were identified (lack of social security number, rapid turnover of prisoners, limited space/personnel within the prison, need to transfer potential participants to the prison hospital, bureaucracy etc).
- The program will continue and it is intended to serve as pilot to introduce HCV screening and treatment in Greek prisons.