

QulHN Hepatitis C Treatment and management Program

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Background/Approach: The Queensland Injectors Health Network (QulHN) is a non-government peak organisation working with people who inject drugs via the provision of 5 Queensland primary needle syringe programs (NSP) and a Hepatitis C testing and treatment program. From 2015 QulHN has treated nearly 800 people through the adoption of innovative and flexible strategies including harm reduction case management, nurse practitioner led mobile outreach clinics, incentives, person-centred wholistic care, and most recently the addition of Hepatitis C point of care testing utilising the GeneXpert system and HCV Fingerstick Viral Load test cartridges.

Analysis/Argument: Hepatitis C testing and treatment numbers have gradually reduced from 2018, followed by the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 and introduction of movement restrictions in the community, QulHN introduced Hepatitis C Point of care testing as an opportunistic testing method suitable to the NSP client group with the goal of increasing testing rates and therefore Hepatitis C treatment rates.

Outcome/Results: Hepatitis C point of care testing was introduced in November 2020 with 26 QulHN staff trained including peer, harm reduction and nursing staff. Over a period of 12 months, 595 valid tests have been conducted at both QulHN NSPs, Queensland Health NSP, and targeted blitz events collaborating with the Micah project, private Opiate Substitution Therapy, and Aboriginal Medical Services in Inala and Sunshine Coast. The HCV Detected rate across all valid tests is 16.5%. Testing rates have increased across all outreach sites.

Conclusions/Applications: Hepatitis C point of care testing conducted by harm reduction workers has proven to be a successful mode of testing to increase rates amongst the NSP client group. QulHN is now expanding point of care testing options to include HIV and Syphilis antibody to provide a more comprehensive offering of tests in a stigma free and safe space for people who are injecting drugs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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