PREVALENCE AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HOSPITALISATION FOR DRUG-RELATED CAUSES AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS: THE ETHOS ENGAGE STUDY

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Background:

Health consequences of injecting drug use often necessitate medical management in hospital settings. Injecting-related skin and soft tissue infections (SSTIs) are a common reason for hospitalisation of people who inject drugs (PWID) and contribute considerable burden to healthcare systems. This study assessed the prevalence and factors associated with drug-related hospitalisation among PWID.

Methods:

ETHOS Engage is an observational study of PWID engaged in harm reduction services in Australia. Participants completed a self-administered questionnaire at baseline. Logistic regression models were used to identify factors associated with hospitalisation in the preceding year for (1) any drug-related cause, and (2) SSTIs (abscess and/or cellulitis) specifically.

Results:

Among 1,443 participants enrolled between May 2018 – September 2019, 1,100 reported injecting drug use in the past six months (65% male; 63% aged ≥ 40 years; 40% receiving opioid agonist treatment [OAT]). Past-year hospitalisation for drug-related causes was reported by 39% (n=433) of participants. Participants who were female (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] 1.41; 1.07-1.85), recently incarcerated (aOR 1.49; 1.02-2.19), injected cocaine (past 6 months; aOR 2.34; 1.53-3.57), received OAT >1 year ago (vs.
never; aOR 1.49; 1.06-2.11) or had hazardous alcohol use (AUDIT-C; aOR 1.36; 1.05-1.77) were more likely to be hospitalised for drug use. Drug-related hospitalisation was less likely among participants injecting heroin (past 6 months; aOR 0.66; 0.50-0.87) or recruited from outer regional areas (aOR 0.59; 0.39-0.91). Past-year hospitalisation for SSTIs was reported by 21% (n=228) of participants and was more likely among females (aOR 1.75; 1.27-2.42) and participants with recent incarceration (aOR 1.89; 1.20-2.97). Injecting frequency was not associated with likelihood of SSTI-related hospitalisation (<weekly vs. daily injecting in past month; aOR 1.11; 0.66-1.85).

Conclusions:
Drug-related hospitalisation is common among PWID. Interventions to prevent drug-related harms and subsequent hospitalisation should be targeted towards groups at higher risk of drug-related hospitalisation, including female PWID.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: JG is a consultant/advisor and has received research grants from AbbVie, Cepheid, Gilead, and Merck outside the submitted work. GJD is a consultant/advisor and has received investigator-initiated untied educational grants for studies of opioid medications in Australia from Indivior, Mundipharma and Seqirus. JH has received travel, accommodation, speaker fees and WOWS support from Janssen, Lundbeck, Servier, and Indivior. PR has received speaker fees from Gilead and MSD, and research funding from Gilead. CT has received speaker fees from AbbVie and Gilead and has received a research grant from Merck outside the submitted work. All other authors declare no conflict of interest.