EFFECT ON HCV TREATMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. DATA FROM AN EXPERTIZED HEPATOLOGY CLINIC IN NORTHERN GREECE (THESSALONIKI)

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Background

Despite the very difficult period due to COVID-19 pandemic, the effort to eliminate HCV infection is still an important goal, especially in people who inject drugs (PWIDs). The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on HCV treatment in PWIDs who visited our expertized hepatology clinic in Thessaloniki, Greece

Methods

Data collected from March 2020 to January 2022 (COVID period, duration 23 months) were compared with those from April 2018 to February 2020 (non-COVID period, duration 23 months).

Results

During the non-COVID period, 257 PWIDs (89.4% men, mean age 45.19) initiated HCV treatment with DAAs. 206/257 (80.16%) reported access to addiction programs. 236/257 (91.83%) completed treatment. 172/236 (72.88%) were tested for Sustain Virological Response (SVR12). 161/172 (93.6%) achieved it.

During the COVID period, 129 patients (men 88.37%, mean age 42.85) initiated treatment with DAAs. 82/129 (63.57%) reported access to addiction programs. 110/129 (85.27%) completed treatment. 83/110 had completed treatment by September 2021 and were able to be tested for SVR12. 52/83 (62.65%) were tested for SVR12. 50/52 (96.15%) achieved it.

Comparing the two periods, there was a significant reduction in PWIDs who initiated HCV treatment in the COVID period (129vs256). Treatment completion (85.27%vs 91.83%) as well as testing for SVR12 (62.65% vs72.88%) was slightly lower in the COVID period, while successful outcome was almost equal in the two periods (96.15% vs93.6%). During the COVID period, fewer patients were enrolled in addiction programs (63.57% vs 80.16%).

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, initiation of HCV treatment was negatively affected in PWIDs. Nevertheless, a sufficient number completed therapy and were tested for treatment outcome. Reduced access to both hospital and addiction services could explain the reduced number of PWIDs initiating HCV treatment during the COVID period. More efforts need to be made for HCV elimination.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

Nothing to disclose