

ONGOING TRANSMISSION OF HCV INFECTION IN COMMUNITY RECRUITED PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN ATHENS, GREECE (2018-2020)

Authors:

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Background:

An outbreak of HIV infection occurred among People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) in Athens, Greece, in 2011 and high levels of HCV transmission were documented. We aim to assess HCV transmission in 2018-2020 in a sample of community-recruited PWID.

Methods:

ARISTOTLE HCV-HIV was a “seek-test-treat” program implemented in two rounds (April 2018-February 2019, N=1365; August 2019-February 2020, N=578, discontinued due to the COVID-19 pandemic). PWID were recruited using Respondent-Driven Sampling and could participate in both rounds. Participation included interviewing, HCV/HIV testing and counseling. We assessed anti-HCV prevalence at first participation among “new injectors” (≤ 2 years injecting drug use) as a crude proxy for incidence. We also estimated HCV incidence from 55 initially seronegative PWID who participated in both rounds. The seroconversion time was estimated using the midpoint between negative and positive test dates.

Results:

In total, 1,630 PWID were recruited. Participants had a mean (SD) age of 39.2 (8.3) years; 83.6% were male, 26.7% homeless, 75.0% current PWID (injection in the past 30 days), 77.0% not linked to opioid substitution treatment, 7.7% “new” injectors. Anti-HCV prevalence was 39.2% (95% Confidence Interval [95% CI]: 30.6, 48.3) among “new” injectors. HCV incidence was 13.8 cases/100 person-years (95% CI: 7.2, 26.5).

Conclusion:

In a sample of high-risk PWID (current injectors, not linked to opioid substitution treatment) in 2018-2020, 4 out of 10 became HCV infected within the first 2 years of injecting drugs. This is slightly lower as compared to a previous estimate for 2012-2013 (49.9% (95% CI:45.0%, 54.7%). However, this proxy measure and the estimated incidence rate highlight high levels of HCV transmission in this population and failure to meet the HCV elimination target for reduction in incidence.

A Disclosure of Interest Statement

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SR, TA, and SC have no conflict of interest to declare.