

NEW APPROACHES TO HCV DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT INITIATION IN A MOBILE OUTREACH PROGRAM IN LISBON

Authors:

Pereira C¹, Morais D¹, Faria H¹, Carvalho R¹, Coutinho R¹

¹ Ares do Pinhal

Introduction/Background:

Regardless of the efforts to implement harm reduction programs for active drug users and for people experiencing homelessness, Infectious diseases (ID) remain a leading cause of death. These programs focus on screening, diagnosis, and treatment initiation. The Mobile Outreach Program (MOP) managed by Ares do Pinhal is focused on health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment referral, and resuming screening at pre-pandemic levels.

Methods/Materials:

Written informed consent is provided to access individual medical records. Screening for ID is integral to the MOP strategy. Currently, patients perform rapid tests and RNA testing for HCV at the MOP, for the ones with AbHCV reactive. The ones with positive RNA results are referred to the hospital for treatment initiation and follow-up. Previously, blood samples were collected at the MOP, but testing was performed at the hospital, delaying diagnosis and treatment initiation.

Results:

Directly observed therapy (DOT) follows treatment initiation at the MOP, in which the medication is concomitantly taken along the daily methadone substitution program.

Since February 2023, 83 PWID were screened, of which 51 had positive AbHCV results. Out of this, 28 had RNA-HCV positive and an indication to initiate treatment. Most of these participants are Males (95%), and Asian migrants (52%), with a proportion of 2/1 versus Portuguese participants. Portuguese participants are almost 20 years on average older than others.

Discussion:

By ensuring that after AbHCV positive results, the RNA-HCV is immediately performed, a swifter referral and treatment initiation is possible, decreasing the dropout. The screening and testing at the MOP also decrease the burden on the hospitals. Migrants living in Lisbon increased, most facing precarious living conditions and often marginalized from social and health services. The MOP must ensure that in the near future, a structured approach to referral is put in place involving all relevant stakeholders.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare