

ON THE ROAD TO MAKING 'CAIRNS HEP C FREE BY 2020' – ARE WE THERE YET?

Darren B Russell^{1,3}, Penny Fox², Eugene Priscott^{1,3}, Rhondda Lewis¹, Carla Z Gorton¹

¹*Cairns Sexual Health Service, Cairns, Australia*, ²*Liver Clinic, Cairns Hospital, Cairns, Australia*, ³*School of Medicine and Dentistry, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia*

Background:

Cairns has a population of approximately 165,000, but provides medical services for 250,000 people in Far North Qld. The 'Cairns Hep C Free by 2020' campaign commenced in early 2016 prior to the listing of the new Direct-Acting Agents (DAAs) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Stakeholders, including the Cairns Hepatitis Action Team (CHAT), the Cairns Hospital Liver Clinic, Cairns Sexual Health Service, Lotus Glen Correctional Centre, the physician Outreach team that services the Torres Strait and Cape York communities, general practitioners (GPs), and the local community of people living with hepatitis C were engaged and treatment roll-out began.

Outcome:

Successes have been seen in treating nearly all known people with hepatitis C attending the services above. Lotus Glen Correction Centre has maintained a low prevalence of hepatitis – below 2%, with very few incident cases - and the Liver Clinic receives on average fewer than 10 referrals for treatment per month. Ongoing engagement with GPs suggests there is not a significant number of untreated people with hepatitis. Academic detailing and support to GPs before and during the early phase of the DAA roll-out means that large numbers of GPs in Cairns prescribe DAAs.

The only group who still has a relatively high prevalence is a number of people who inject drugs (PWID) whom we have not been able to engage in care and treatment. In 2016 a convenience sample found hepatitis C RNA rates of 22-33%; in 2017 rates of 15-20% were found; in 2018 18% of 105 PWID sampled were RNA positive. Many of these individuals have since completed a treatment course.

Conclusions:

Increasing efforts have been put into reaching local PWID, though engagement remains challenging. We believe, however, that we are on track to be virtually hepatitis C free by the end of 2020.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.