C-BUDDIES: MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE IN A COMPREHENSIVE “NOT UNDER ONE ROOF “APPROACH FOR HEPATITIS C MANAGEMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS.

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**Background:** People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) are the main group affected by hepatitis C (HCV) and do not always have a stable social network. However, having support during HCV treatment, is essential to cope with various associated challenges. In Antwerp (Belgium), we developed a ‘not under one roof’ model with promising results. This individually tailored approach consists of a close collaboration between specialized hepatologists and a multidisciplinary, low-threshold drug care centre. Nevertheless, we noticed something missing. Therefore we initiated a peer-driven project, called the C-Buddy project, operational from 2009 until 2011 and restarted in 2015.

**Method:** The C-Buddy project marks the commitment of PWID who completed therapy, as support of PWID entering therapy. Given their own experiences, the C-Buddies, supervised by professionals, showed to be ideally placed to offer maximum support. After recruitment and training, the nature of their support varies from information during the pre-therapy phase, over practical and mental support during therapy to aftercare.

**Results:** Since November 2015, 25 PWID enrolled in the C-Buddy project. 8 PWID completed therapy, 17 recently started or are awaiting treatment. Previously, some PWID were –though not formally-excluded from therapy because of psychiatric problems, low finances and lack of social network. Buddy support allowed also this group to enter and successfully complete therapy. By means of case-studies, we will present our experiences. Firstly*,* we will describe the outlines of our not under one roof approach, highlighting the role of the C-Buddies (nature of support, realizations, shortcomings, pitfalls…). Secondly, we will show how the content/nature of Buddy support is adapted according to the individual needs as well as the therapeutic approach (interferon-based vs DAA).

**Conclusion:** This unique project effectively removes barriers to enter and successfully complete HCV therapy for PWID.

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