

## **THE C-LINK TRIAL: A PROSPECTIVE RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL SHOWING THAT CARE-NAVIGATION POST RELEASE FROM PRISONS INCREASES LINKAGE TO HEPATITIS C CARE**

Papaluca T<sup>1</sup>, Craigie A<sup>1</sup>, McDonald L<sup>1</sup>, Edwards A<sup>1</sup>, Winter R<sup>1,2</sup>, Hoang A<sup>1</sup>, Pappas A<sup>1</sup>, Waldron A<sup>1</sup>, McCoy K<sup>1</sup>, Stoove M<sup>2,3</sup>, Doyle J<sup>2,3,4</sup>, Hellard M<sup>2,3,4</sup>, Holmes J<sup>1</sup>, Maclsaac M<sup>1</sup>, Desmond P<sup>1</sup>, Iser D<sup>1</sup>, Thompson A<sup>1</sup>

*1, Department of Gastroenterology, St Vincent's Hospital and the University of Melbourne. 2, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia. 3, Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine, Monash University, Australia. 4, Department of Infectious Diseases, The Alfred and Monash University, Melbourne Australia.*

### **Background:**

Hepatitis C (HCV) treatment within prisons is safe and effective. Some prisoners, however, are released untreated. On community re-entry, individuals are faced with a number of immediate competing priorities, and in this context, linkage to HCV care is low. Interventions targeted at improving healthcare continuity following re-entry have yielded positive outcomes for other health diagnoses however data regarding HCV transitional care is limited. We evaluated the benefit of transitional care using a care-navigator model on the likelihood of HCV linkage to care amongst individuals released untreated.

### **Methods:**

We conducted a prospective randomised controlled trial in which released prisoners with HCV were assigned to either care-navigation or standard-of-care. Care-navigation included telephone-based contact; providing HCV direct-acting antiviral (DAA) therapies; and reimbursement for DAA co-payment, study participation time, and opioid substitution therapy (OST). Standard-of-care participants had a detailed HCV summary sent to a nominated healthcare provider. The primary outcome was prescription of HCV DAAs within six months of release.

### **Results:**

46 participants were randomised. The mean age was 35 and 62% were male. 90% (n=36/40) had injected drugs within 6 months of incarceration. 28% were prescribed OST. 50% self-reported psychiatric diagnoses. 22 were randomised to care-navigation and 24 to standard-of-care. 73% (n=16/22) in the care-navigation and 33% (n=8/24) in the standard-of-care group were prescribed HCV DAAs within six months of release (p=0.02). Time to DAA prescription was shorter amongst care-navigation participants (21 days [10-42] vs 82 days [44-99] p=0.049). The sole predictor of DAA prescription amongst those receiving care-navigation was ability to successfully contact participants following release (93%, n=14/15 vs 28%, n=2/7, p=0.01).

### **Conclusion:**

HCV transitional care for individuals re-entering the community is associated with a higher likelihood of DAA initiation and reduced time to treatment. Treatment rates amongst unsupported individuals are low. Similar programs should be implemented to contribute towards HCV elimination.

### **Disclosure of interest statement:**

There are no disclosures of interest of note in regard to this research.