

COMBINED COVID-19 VACCINATION AND HEPATITIS C VIRUS SCREENING INTERVENTION FOR HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS AT A CENTRE FOR ADDICTION SERVICES IN BARCELONA, SPAIN

Grau L¹, Buti M^{1,2}, Villota-Rivas M³, Lazarus JV^{3,4}

¹ Department of Internal Medicine, Hospital Universitario Vall d'Hebron, Barcelona, Spain, ² CIBERhd, Instituto de Salud Carlos III, Madrid, Spain, ³ Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), Hospital Clínic, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain, ⁴ Faculty of Medicine, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Background:

COVID-19 has hindered efforts to address the hepatitis C virus (HCV) by reducing testing, particularly in marginalised groups, who have some of the highest rates of HCV and lowest rates of COVID-19 vaccination.

Description of model of care/intervention:

We explored the acceptability of combining HCV point-of-care testing (PoCT) with COVID-19 vaccination in a centre for addiction services in Barcelona, Spain. During 20/1/2022-10/3/2022, 51 individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) were invited to get the COVID-19 vaccine along with HCV antibody (Ab) screening. If HCV Ab+, they were offered HCV-RNA PoCT. If HCV-RNA+, patients would be offered linkage to care.

Effectiveness:

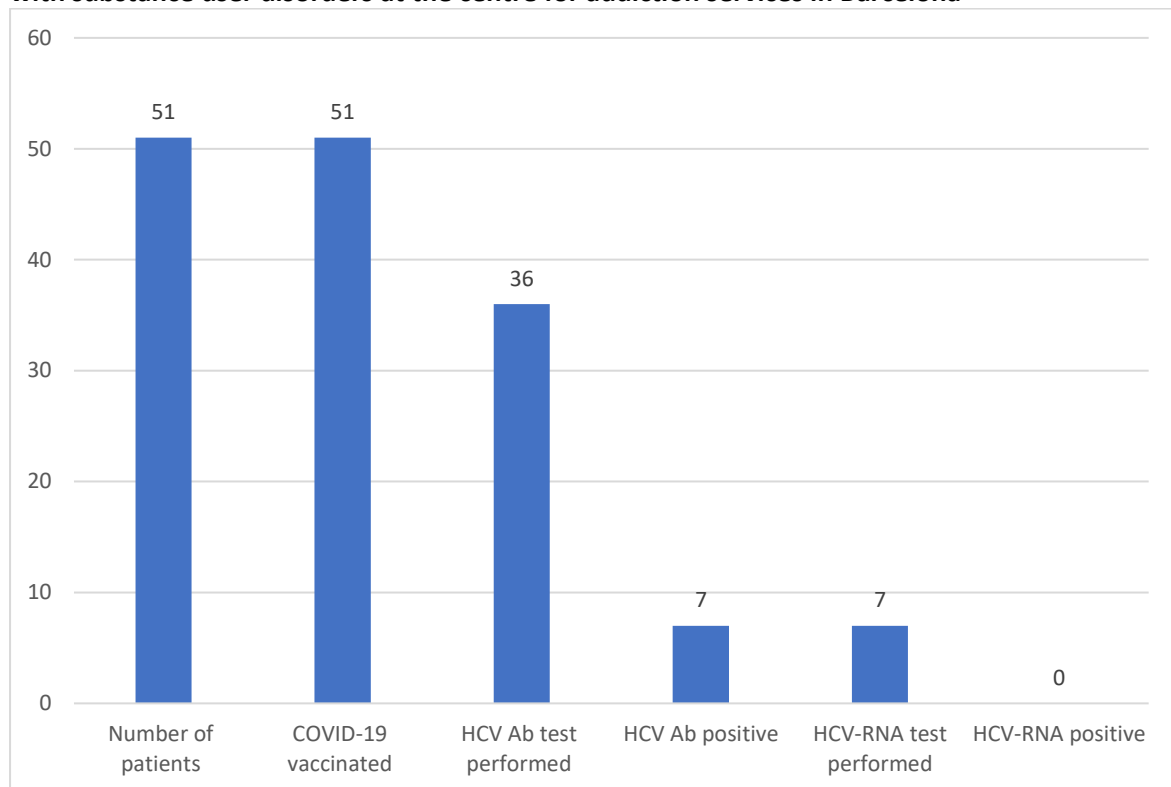
Of the 51 participants, 80.4% were male and 88.2% Spanish-born. The mean age was 47.5 (SD: 9.7); 23.5% reported being unemployed; 29.4% an incarceration history; and 51.0% multimorbidity. Of all, 35.3% reported a past HCV infection, of which all reported that the most likely route of transmission was injecting drug use. Only 11.8% reported a previous COVID-19 diagnosis and most (90.2%) had been vaccinated for COVID-19, of which 89.1% had received the full first round schedule but none had received a booster. Everyone received a Moderna vaccine without any identified adverse events (Figure). Of the total, 70.6% were tested for HCV Ab and 19.4% were positive. Of these, all were tested for HCV-RNA and none were positive.

Conclusion and next steps:

The intervention had an acceptability rate of 70.6% and was safe, since no adverse events to HCV testing were reported. It also optimised participants' time use as they would have been waiting post-vaccine administration and it prevented the need for multiple visits. This approach can serve as an example of a novel model of care to increase HCV screening and linkage to care, as needed, along with COVID-19 vaccination, in high-risk populations. Next steps include continuing participant recruitment.

Figure:

Figure. Analysis of the combined COVID-19 vaccination and HCV screening intervention in people with substance user disorders at the centre for addiction services in Barcelona



Abbreviations: Ab, antibody; HCV, hepatitis C virus.

Disclosure of interest statement:

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