

Introduction

PWUD remain the key population in the effort of Hepatitis C (HCV) elimination. Covid-19 pandemic has affected access to care and treatment and set an obstacle to the elimination goals. In Greece harm reduction programs were reduced or stopped, and linkage to care with liver units for HCV patients became difficult due to the regional lockdowns.

Aim

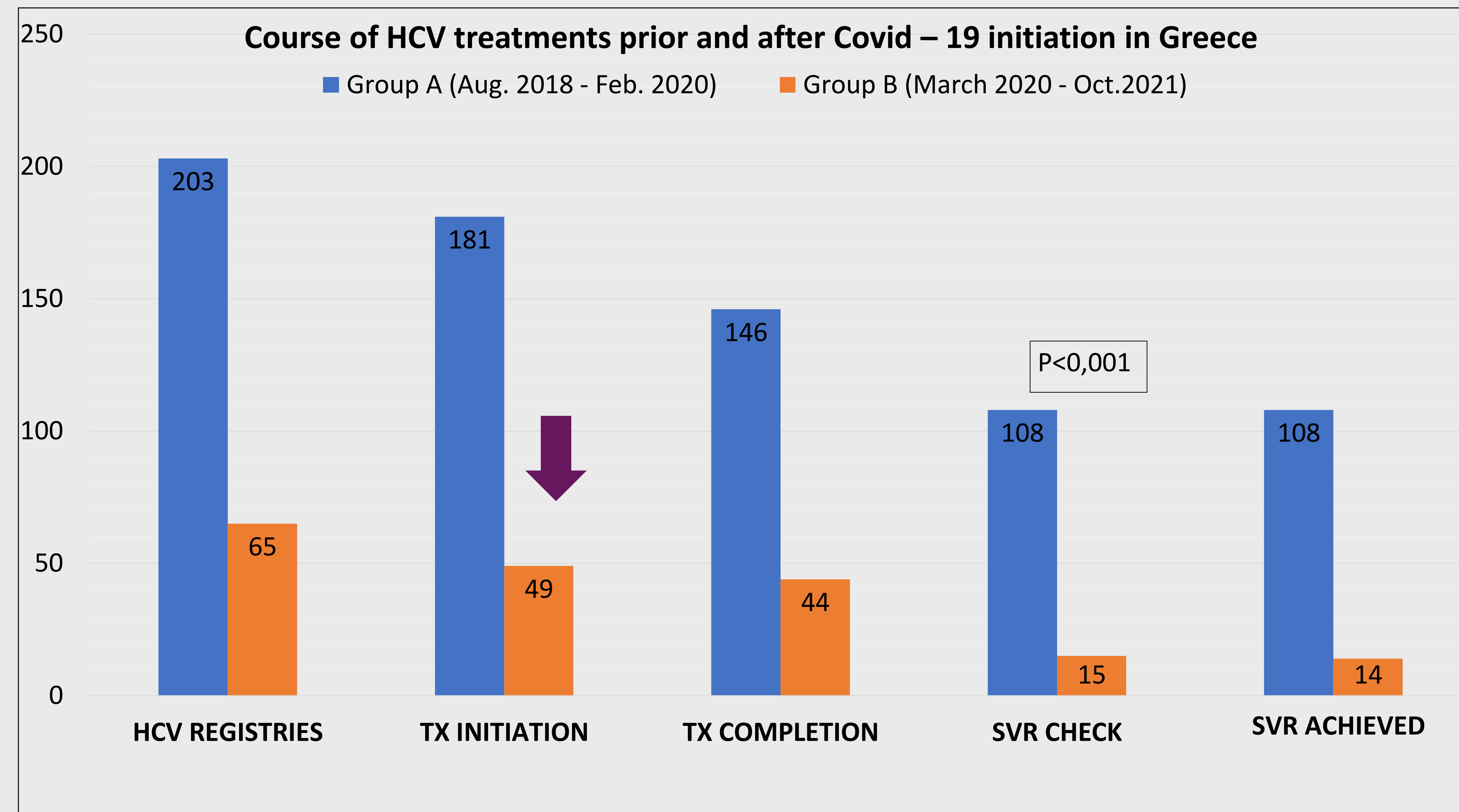
Our aim was to determine whether Covid-19 affected linkage to care and treatment for PWUD and restrained HCV elimination programs.

Methods

In this study 268 patients were included, with a history of drug use, who visited our outpatient liver clinic in order to get HCV treatment from August 2018 until October 2021. Patients were divided in two equal period groups: **Group A (pts from Aug. 2018 to Feb. 2020)** and **Group B (Pts from March 2020 to October 2021)**, based on the beginning of the pandemic and lockdown in Greece on March 2020

Results

- From August 2018 to February 2020, 203 patients (Group A) were screened and found eligible for HCV treatment. Application for treatment in the national HCV registry was made for all 203 and 181 patients initiated HCV treatment.
- From March 2020 until October 2021 (Group B), 65 patients were registered for HCV treatment and 49 initiated treatment (p=0,01).
- In Group A 146 patients completed treatment and 108/146 (59,6%) were submitted in HCV RNA testing for SVR confirmation.
- In Group B 44 patients completed treatment but only 15/44 patients (34%) were submitted in HCV RNA testing (p <0,001).



Results

- In Group A all of the 108 patients achieved SVR (100%). SVR rates remained high in Group B with 14/15 patients achieving SVR.
- in Group A, 134/181 patients (74%) were submitted to Transient Elastography (TE) and 23 had evidence of cirrhosis (defined as stiffness >11,5 kPa). in group B, only 7/49 (14%) patients were submitted to TE and 3 of them had evidence of cirrhosis.
- Substitution programs (methadone /buprenorphine) were attending almost half of the patients in each of the two groups.

Patients Characteristics	Group A (N=181)	Group B (N=49)
Age (mean±SD)	46,5 ±10	48±9,5
Gender Male	146 (80,6%)	34 (69%)
Genotype	Gn3: 55% Gn1a: 25,4%	Gn3: 67% Gn1a: 18%
Cirrhosis	23/ 134 (17%)	3/ 7 (42%)
Substitution therapy	95 (52%)	24 (49%)

Conclusions

Our study postulated that all HCV–PWUD patients, regardless of attending substitution programs succeeded SVR in both periods, while there was a significant reduction (68%) in treatment initiation during the Covid-19 period. The pandemic affected HCV treatment at several steps of the care cascade as significant reduction of SVR monitoring and elastographic evaluations was observed, a fact that could potentially affect long term surveillance of the HCV patients. Implementation of new strategies are necessary in order to remain on HCV elimination track particularly for vulnerable populations.

TOTAL GN DISTRIBUTION = 268

