

PEER DELIVERED HEPATITIS C TESTING IN A COMMUNITY PHARMACY - MEETING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS.

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Background:

Significant numbers of people who inject drugs (PWID), including those receiving opiate substitution therapy (OST) and/or needle and syringe provision (NSP) have limited engagement with drug services, without comprehensive care, and poorly informed on injecting related risks.

Many PWID identify as being socially marginalised, experiencing health inequalities and unable without peer support, to navigate standard hepatitis C (HCV) testing, treatment and care pathways. This situation became more pronounced during the COVID pandemic as resources and access to holistic care and specifically harm reduction interventions were restricted.

Description of model of care/intervention:

Identified and informed by PWID experiences, the Hepatitis C Trust peer support project developed a community pharmacy based HCV testing initiative for those receiving OST and/or NSP. Over five testing sessions at one community pharmacy, clients were offered peer delivered HCV testing and support to treatment.

Effectiveness:

The project was attractive to the target community who reported ease of access and engagement in contrast to previously experienced barriers to testing and treatment, promoting the service to others in their injecting networks:

170 were screened for HCV antibodies.

75 were tested for HCV

40 RNA -ve (29 previously treated but without SVR, 11 self-cleared)

18 RNA +ve (3 reinfections)

17 results pending.

14 patients have started treatment to date

Conclusion and next steps:

Pharmacy testing has been a resounding success with majority identified with HCV being supported to start or about to start treatment. Support is planned for cohort tested with results pending. Peer support is ongoing including safer injecting guidance to reduce reinfections and pharmacy based SVR12 and SVR48 testing for those who initiated treatment prior to, and as a result of the testing project. This pharmacy testing model is now being adopted across pharmacy settings in other areas to meet the HCV needs of underserved PWID.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust has received funding via the NHS England elimination agenda through Merck Sharp & Dohme to fund a Hepatitis C Community Liaison Support Officer. This role works in partnership with the Hepatitis C Trust Peer Coordinator and Peer Support Lead in delivering the Leicestershire Hepatitis C Operational Delivery Network elimination plan.

