

PARTNERING HEPATOLOGY NURSES AND PEER WORKERS TO INCREASE TREATMENT AMONG MARGINALISED PEOPLE

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Background/ Approach:

Despite unparalleled access to hep C treatment in Australia, some people living with hep C still face unique barriers to getting cured. Our health information and treatment access program, *Live Hep C Free*, works to reduce the difficulty marginalised people face in navigating the health system by meeting the people where they're at with the healthcare they need.

Analysis/ Argument:

The *Live Hep C Free* program partners peer workers with hepatology nurses to facilitate easier access to testing and treatment. Our trained peers work alongside hepatology nurses at services accessed by people living with hep C such as opioid substitution therapy clinics, alcohol and other drug services, and needle and syringe program outlets. Peer workers utilise their lived experience to engage in conversation with clients of these services, create a supportive relationship, and provide a bridge into treatment offered by the clinical staff.

Outcome/ Results:

At Clinic 36 in Chippendale, Sydney, 17 people were started on hep C treatment in just a couple of months of a *Live Hep C Free* peer worker being engaged by the attending hepatology nurse. Prior to these 17 people had been accessing that service for some time without ever accessing hep C treatment. A similar story emerged at Canterbury Drug Health Service where another peer worker was able to encourage 40 people into testing and treatment with the hepatology nurse.

By combining the expertise of clinical staff with the lived experience of peers, the program is improving treatment uptake in services accessed by marginalised people living with hep C.

Conclusions/ Applications:

Partnering people with lived experience of hep C and hepatology nurses is an ideal combination for making hep C treatment, and the healthcare workers involved in it, more easily accessible. Peers' shared experience with clients is vital in increasing treatment uptake by bridging the barriers that prevent marginalised people accessing the healthcare to enable them to live hep C free.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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