

DISTRIBUTION OF HCV SELF-TEST KITS VIA SYRINGE VENDING MACHINES (SVM) IN TBILISI, GEORGIA

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Background: People who inject drugs (PWID) in Georgia exhibit a high prevalence of hepatitis C virus antibody (anti-HCV). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends offering HCV self-testing as an additional approach to conventional testing services. Our intervention aimed to distribute HCV self-test kits among PWID in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Description of the Intervention:

Since 2019, ten SVMs have been installed in Tbilisi, dispensing sterile equipment free of charge to PWIDs with special plastic cards distributed by Needle and Syringe Programs. From February to May 2023, we piloted the distribution of OraQuick rapid HCV antibody tests, limiting self-tests to one per day. After acquiring a self-test, beneficiaries voluntarily completed a brief quantitative questionnaire upon their return to obtain another product from SVMs, integrated into the SVM's screen. The questionnaire covered self-test usage and outcomes.

Effectiveness:

There was a high uptake of HCV self-tests among beneficiaries, with a total of 302 dispensed over three months. Ninety beneficiaries completed the questionnaire, of whom 61 PWID reported utilizing self-tests. Fourteen individuals indicated potential HCV positivity, while 37 tested negative. A web portal - www.sigma.ge - was developed for beneficiaries to find information about services and confirm HCV diagnoses.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

While achieving linkage to care was unsuccessful, self-test kits were efficiently distributed among PWID. Innovative strategies are necessary to follow up on positive cases and refer them for confirmatory tests. Further assessment of the effectiveness and acceptability of HCV self-tests is needed. Our results suggest that distributing self-tests can contribute to HCV elimination efforts in the country.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The intervention is supported by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.