

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT – LESSONS FROM THE RAPID-EC STUDY: A POINT-OF-CARE HEPATITIS C TESTING PILOT IN NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMS TARGETED TO PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction:

Point-of-care (POC) diagnostics offer advantages over conventional hepatitis C (HCV) testing: same-day diagnosis, testing outside traditional health services, provision by non-clinical staff and avoiding venipuncture. The Rapid-EC study assessed the feasibility and acceptability of providing HCV POC testing from needle and syringe exchange programs (NSPs).

Methods:

A prospective observational pilot study over a 3-month period, in three inner-Melbourne community clinics with NSPs. NSP workers, community health workers (CHWs), and nurses offered clients not engaged in HCV care an OraQuick HCV antibody mouth swab test (20 minutes); followed by a Xpert HCV viral load using serum (105 minutes). Same-day results were offered onsite, via phone, text message, or on return visit. All participants were offered confirmatory testing, all positive participants were booked into a follow-up appointment and linked to DAA treatment, where appropriate. Participants completed evaluation surveys and staff were interviewed.

Results:

174 participants completed POC testing for HCV antibodies; 150 (86%) had a reactive result and who 140 (93%) underwent a POC HCV RNA test, of who 76 (54%) had detectable RNA. 7 of the 140 (5%) participants waited on-site to receive their POC RNA result, 85 (61%) opted for a phone call/text message. 104 of the 140 (74%) attended the follow-up visit within a median of 11 days (IQR 7-20 days). Clients reported strong preferences for POC tests (97/116, 85%) and CHW and NSP worker involvement in the testing process (104/106, 98%). Staff reported POC testing was a novel way to engage clients in HCV testing and streamline pathways to care.

Conclusion:

Provision of POC testing through NSPs was feasible and linked new clients into HCV testing and DAA treatment. POC testing reduces barriers for clients to access HCV testing and is a novel engagement tool that may help services retain clients in the HCV cascade of care.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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