

Harnessing Lived Experience and Multi-Sectoral Partnerships to Eliminate Viral Hepatitis and Related Infections in Sierra Leone

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Background

Viral hepatitis remains a significant public health challenge in Sierra Leone, where limited awareness, stigma, inadequate access to testing, and weak community engagement hinder elimination efforts. The Sierra Liver Foundation (SiLiFo), founded and led by a person with lived experience of hepatitis, was established to address these barriers through advocacy, awareness, stigma reduction, partnerships, and prevention initiatives. This study describes a community-led approach that integrates lived experience into hepatitis elimination efforts while addressing related infections including HIV and syphilis.

Methods

A community-based advocacy and engagement model was implemented through SiLiFo and the Hepatitis Patients Association (HePA). Activities included public awareness campaigns, community dialogues, school outreach, radio discussions, social media engagement, patient support initiatives, and cross-sector partnerships. In addition, a baseline survey questionnaire was developed to assess knowledge and practices related to hepatitis, HIV, syphilis, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), key populations, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT).

Results

The lived experience approach increased community trust, strengthened patient engagement, and encouraged uptake of hepatitis information and services. Awareness campaigns improved public understanding of hepatitis transmission, prevention, testing, and treatment. Anti-stigma interventions created safer spaces for dialogue and encouraged affected individuals to seek care. The partnership between SiLiFo and HePA strengthened advocacy efforts and expanded collaboration with healthcare institutions, government stakeholders, and community organizations. The baseline survey tool established a foundation for future evidence-based interventions targeting PMTCT and integrated health services.

Conclusion

Lived experience can serve as a powerful catalyst for hepatitis advocacy, stigma reduction, community mobilization, and partnership development. The SiLiFo-HePA model demonstrates how patient-led leadership combined with multi-sectoral collaboration can strengthen hepatitis elimination efforts in resource-limited settings. This approach offers a practical framework for integrating community voices into national and global hepatitis responses.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this work.

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