

PEER-LED COMMUNITY BASED INTEGRATED BBV/COVID TESTING AND LINKAGE TO CARE IN COVID EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION FOR THE HOMELESS IN LONDON, UK

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Background:

Emergency COVID homeless accommodation provided an opportunity to offer healthcare interventions to a marginalised population. We describe the collaborative response to an integrated BBV/COVID testing service, working with new partners and peers amidst the global pandemic as it affected London, UK in 2020. Out of great chaos, an important opportunity was borne to adapt our model of care for the most vulnerable people in our city.

Description of model of care/intervention:

The Find&Treat team, in collaboration with The Hepatitis C Trust and numerous community-based partners, provided outreach testing, utilising point-of-care (POC) BBV testing with a team of highly trained peer support workers (PSWs). Under clinical supervision of the outreach nursing team, they carried out POC HCV, HBV, HIV and syphilis testing. COVID-19 testing (PCR) was also carried out on symptomatic individuals as well mass testing to prevent outbreaks. Those testing positive for BBVs had further blood tests and investigations in the community and onward peer-supported referrals to specialist care.

Effectiveness:

Over one thousand individuals (n=1,196) in a 6-month period were tested for hepatitis B, C, HIV and syphilis. A high prevalence of HCV (5.9%), HIV (2.4%) and syphilis (1.2%) were found, with fewer than expected HBV infections (0.6%). Over three quarters (77.4%) of people with chronic HCV either started or completed treatment and less than 10% were lost to follow-up. COVID-19 tests were carried out on 2,362 individuals, identifying 30 positive cases.

Conclusion and next steps:

The legacy is a pan-London network of PSWs who provide BBV testing and ongoing collaborations between previously distinct testing providers. The relatively low rate of COVID positive cases during the first wave showed that appropriate accommodation limited the rate of transmission in this vulnerable population. Furthermore, PSWs now provide COVID-19 vaccinations to the same population, further integrating multiple effective interventions.

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