

A swift response: utilising point-of-care HCV RNA testing in a multiagency effort to address a potential public health risk in a NSW prison

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Background/Approach: In September 2022, a small number of acute HCV infections were detected at Junee Correctional Centre, a prison with the capacity of 1280 people, privately operated by The GEO Group Australia Pty Ltd (GEO). The health services team at Junee quickly reviewed at-risk patients and commenced HCV treatment. In consultation with the NSW Ministry of Health and Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network (Justice Health NSW), it was decided a more intensive response would mitigate the potential of an outbreak occurring. This analysis evaluated engagement in health promotion activities, testing and treatment for HCV.

Analysis/Argument: A response was designed, including point-of-care HCV RNA testing (HCV Viral Load Fingerstick), linkage to specialist nursing care, health education and harm reduction. A public/private partnership approach between NSW Health, GEO, Flinders University, and the Kirby Institute was formed to coordinate/deliver the response package. Within three weeks, a multidisciplinary team across organisations initiated the program. Access to disinfectants and condoms were reviewed and posters and HCV education sessions delivered centre-wide.

Outcome/Results: Between October 11-21 2022, on average, 883 people were in the centre most of whom most engaged in HCV health promotion activities (including the distribution of water bottles, playing cards, and magazines) and 604 people received point-of-care HCV RNA testing (68% of the prison). Overall, 95% of people received a valid test result (n=573) and 7.9% (45/573) had detectable HCV RNA and were linked to nursing care, (7.9% RNA+ is consistent with other NSW prisons). Within 7 working days of testing, HCV DAA therapy was prescribed to 88% (40/45) of those identified and 44% (20/45) have initiated treatment.

Conclusions/Applications: HCV point-of-care testing, health promotion, and specialist HCV nursing services can be mobilised quickly and delivered together onsite via a partnership approach leading to high testing and treatment uptake and address multiple areas of patient need.

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