

Improving Timely Linkage to Care for Hepatitis B/D and Advanced Liver Disease patients: Outcomes of a Monthly Health Condition Audit Initiative

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Background:

Within the custodial setting, timely linkage to specialist care is an ongoing challenge. Patients in custody are disproportionately affected by hepatitis B, hepatitis D and advanced liver disease, with short custodial stays, frequent transfers between correctional centres and competing clinical priorities impacting on patient management. To address this, a monthly health condition audit was implemented to systematically identify patients and link them into care. This initiative aimed to improve timeliness of patient identification, strengthen clinical governance and enhance continuity of care.

Argument:

Linkage to care remains inconsistent within the custodial setting despite clear referral pathways, with patients often progressing through their incarceration period without the required referrals. Given the elevated risk of liver related conditions and subsequent complications, a systematic approach is warranted to be able to identify these patients and ensure timely follow up to prevent poor health outcomes.

Outcome:

The outcome of this audit was a reduction in patients without referral to specialist hepatology services. Over time, the number of patients lacking specialist referral had decreased, indicating a greater understanding and recognition of the importance of referral for specialist follow up. Not only were patient outcomes improved, but communication between staff was also strengthened, with population health staff and specialist teams (hepatology) bridging a gap in services.

Conclusions/Applications:

The implementation of the monthly statewide audit has proven to be a low cost and reproducible method of tracking patients in custody, ensuring linkage to care and ongoing follow up as required. This project recognises the disproportionate poor health outcomes for patients in custody and highlights the importance of embedding a routine surveillance program to ensure better patient outcomes. This audit addresses the complexities of the custodial setting, proactively finding patients who may otherwise move through their incarceration period under the radar of healthcare providers.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Nil disclosure of interest to declare