Dried Blood Spot Testing in Harm Reduction Programs

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Background

Hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV testing traditionally require venous blood samples, which can be challenging in harm reduction settings such as Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs). Many people who inject drugs (PWID) experience poor venous access, making venepuncture difficult and discouraging testing, limiting early diagnosis and treatment opportunities.

Method

In 2024, as part of a NSW Health initiative, the Harm Reduction Program at Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) introduced dried blood spot (DBS) testing as an alternative to venepuncture. Staff completed mandatory training, and clients were educated through in-service materials and NSP fit packs. A $20 Coles voucher was provided as an incentive. Individuals with HCV-positive results received ongoing clinical care from a Clinical Nurse Consultant (CNC) and a Registered Nurse (RN). Data on test uptake, client feedback, and treatment initiation were collected.

Results

A total of 589 DBS tests were conducted, engaging individuals who previously avoided traditional blood tests. Of those tested, 29 HCV cases were identified, and 22 commenced treatments. DBS was well accepted, offering a simple, effective, and less invasive screening method.

Conclusion

DBS testing successfully increased HCV screening uptake among PWID in harm reduction settings, demonstrating its reliability as an alternative to venepuncture. Its ease of use and accessibility improved engagement, enhancing testing availability in NSPs and Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) clinics, supporting early diagnosis and treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine and the 2018 Conference Collaborators recognize the contribution of industry partners and the need for transparency in disclosing potential conflicts of interest.