Opt-out hepatitis C point-of-care-testing on entry to a large remand prison: a Victorian perspective

Authors:
Layton C[1], Shi D[2], McDonald L[1], Muffarotto A[1], Craigie A[1], Holmes J[1,2], Papaluca T[1], Winter R[1,3], Hussain S[4], Grace D[4], Grebely J[5], Thompson A[1,2]

[1]St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, [2]The University of Melbourne, [3]Burnet Institute, [4]GEO Healthcare, [5]The Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales.

Background: HCV testing and treatment is well-established in Victorian prisons. Novel initiatives such as point-of-care testing programs and opt-out testing on entry to prison potential to increase rates of HCV testing, diagnosis and treatment uptake to reach elimination goals. This study evaluated the prevalence of HCV infection and treatment uptake among people with current HCV infection following opt-out testing on entry to a reception prison in Victoria, Australia.

Methods: An observational study of nurse-led HCV point-of-care testing on entry to a large reception prison was conducted over 8-months in Victoria, Australia. Demographics, injecting history, previous HCV and non-participation in testing were collected. Point-of-care testing was performed by HCV antibody (INSTI) or, if previously diagnosed, HCV RNA (Xpert HCV Viral Load Fingerstick test). Prisoners with current HCV were prescribed DAA treatment.

Results: 628/1058 (59%) men who entered the prison on service delivery days (3-days/ week), were tested for HCV.19% (n=118) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Of those tested, 38% (n=236) reported that they had previously injected drugs. 23% (n=142) reported that they had ever been told they had HCV and of those, 69% (n=98) had previously been treated for HCV. HCV antibody prevalence was 24% (148/628) and HCV RNA prevalence was 2% (13/628). All people with current HCV infection commenced treatment within 2-weeks. 41% (n=430) of people were not tested due to declining, illness or operational restrictions.

Conclusion: Opt-out point-of-care testing on entry to prison increased uptake of HCV testing and treatment in a reception prison in Victoria. A low proportion of people with current infection (2%) along with moderate HCV antibody prevalence (24%) suggests considerable progress towards elimination of HCV among people in prisons in Victoria. Further work is needed to understand whether the low prevalence of current HCV infection is observed across other prison settings in Victoria.

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