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Healthier Tomorrows



Custodial patients' perspectives of a hepatitis C virus High Intensity Testing Campaign (HITC)

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Disclosure of Interest Statement

- GeneXpert machines and cartridges provided through National Australian HCV POCT Program from Commonwealth Department of Health, National Health and Medical Research Council, Cepheid, Gilead Sciences, and AbbVie funding.
- We have no disclosures of interest for the qualitative interview research.

- HITC were initiated in custodial settings due to the high prevalence of hepatitis C virus (HCV) among people incarcerated in New South Wales (NSW). Barriers to testing were minimised through HCV point-of-care testing and progressing the care cascade to treatment.
- The aim is to evaluate the participant experience of a High Intensity Testing Campaign (HITC).

- A HITC at Mid North Coast Correctional Center resulted in 90% (n=670) of people tested. Of the participants tested 7.3% (n=49) were HCV RNA detected and 83.6% (n=41) commenced treatment within a two-week period.
- Nineteen participants completed a qualitative interview (structured/semi-structured) based on their experience with point-of-care testing, education and promotion, stigma, and their suggestions to improve and inform future campaigns.

- Participants found point-of-care testing preferable to venepuncture, pre-education was informative and well received, and future HITC improvements were made.
- A variety of motivations were identified as reasons for testing which will be discussed. All participants reported the experience was positive with one respondent stating, ***“we got it right.”***

PoCT testing methods

“The finger prick was a lot more comfortable, a lot better, obviously a lot quicker too. And you don't have to worry about people that are scared of needles with the finger prick. So that's a positive.” (Bradley)

“Never really thought of it (hepatitis C testing) too much until I came to gaol. It's my first time in gaol, so hearing about how much of it's getting around and it was a bit concerning. Yeah, I've had gaol tattoos, and so it was good to get the testing out of the way to just put my mind at ease about the hepatitis.” (Benjamin)

Education offered

“There's some information there (inmate diary) but I also read my tablet as well. Men like people who have been through it all and you can talk. It's easy. And I'll talk to them (lived experience staff) while they pricked us and gave us some lollies for that. The testing campaign here, I think one of the boys was talking about it on the iPad at night and he showed us.” (Edward)

“Sometimes you can get a bit them and us in here. And so having external people that you haven't seen before, it helps make things a bit more eased into it I guess. (Benjamin)

Has your knowledge increased since the HITC?



“When I first came to gaol I caught Hep C within two weeks. Because I thought I had fincol. Most people when they used they wasn't using fincol so that's how I got it I think.” (Dean)

“I was very educated on it once yous told me. I thought was like HIV tell you the truth. I didn't know it was just tablets to get rid of it you know. Yes, just around the tablets & that you can get it cured. You know I thought you couldn't get it cured. Oh if a young fellow came and asked. Me. I'll have a yarn with them about it like, I'll just explain to the young fellas and, you know, I'm on the program now after I got tested. So I'm not chasing it everyday.” (Gordon)

“Everyone's a bit more. Relaxed about in here (gaol). All people look at it differently out there (community). Yeah, look on the outside they say silly stuff. They told me that they don't have that up there & didn't tell me about the pills and stuff. I feel more relaxed in here talking about it but outside, I can't talk about it like there's stigma out there you know. (Gordon)

*“I think there is a little bit but not as much as there used to be. I think now people are sort of getting a bit more, maybe understanding, I don't know. I just know people don't really want to talk about it. Yeah, there, you know, it's not something anyone will talk about but here I kind of want to talk about it.”
(Sarah)*

Recommendations

“They came to the pod on the days, yeah. You know there was lollies Incentives are top notch fine. I can guarantee without all these probably 90% of guys wouldn't have got tested, so lollies is working.” (Koroush)

“No, because everyone was here. If you really want to do it, some people don't do it cause if your gonna get bad news you want some privacy. What are you testing for? Oh, you must shoot up in gaol you know.” (Bilal)

- This qualitative study highlighted participants willingness to be tested knowing hepatitis C is now curable and treatment is tolerable.
- Participants had a positive experience and preferred point-of-care testing due to timeliness of test to result and improving the care cascade to treatment from two to six months to two weeks.
- Participants suggested peer engagement groups to improve knowledge and decrease stigmatisation of hepatitis C.

Thank You

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