

THE ROLE OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND JUSTICE HEALTH STAFF IN PROMOTING HCV TREATMENT UPTAKE AMONG THE PRISONER POPULATION IN NSW CORRECTIONAL CENTRES

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Introduction:

Hepatitis C (HCV) is a global health concern, with high prevalence (26% HCV-antibody positive) among the prisoner population. HCV is primarily transmitted through sharing of unsterile injecting equipment. The Surveillance and Treatment of Prisoners with hepatitis C (SToP-C) study is conducting the first real-world trial of treatment as prevention carried out across four prisons in New South Wales (NSW). This qualitative sub-study sought to understand the ways in which correctional and justice health staff promote and inhibit HCV treatment access in the prison setting.

Methods:

A total of n=41 Justice Health NSW staff and Corrective Services NSW staff participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants included frontline workers (e.g., correctional officers, nurses), managers, and senior administrators across the four correctional centres where SToP-C is being implemented.

Results:

There was a distinct difference between corrections and health staff in relation to attitudes to people who inject drugs. Despite correctional officers prioritising security issues over access to health services, officers in the SToP-C prisons reported a number of benefits of this trial for prisoners, the community (by curing a prisoner's HCV before release), and the correctional workforce through increasing officer knowledge of blood-borne virus risks and increasing workplace safety (through reduction in HCV prevalence). Of the four prisons where SToP-C is implemented, only two prisons have a dedicated SToP-C officer. Dedicated study officers are able to act as a liaison between health and correctional staff while promoting prisoner engagement and enrolment into the study. The role of dedicated study nurses and officers were viewed as favourable in working to reduce the burden of HCV in correctional centres.

Conclusion:

These findings highlight the critical areas for education of correctional officers and health staff to support efforts to engage all prisoners in HCV treatment.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.