

PREFERENCES AND FEASIBILITY OF LONG-ACTING TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE TREATMENT OF HEPATITIS C VIRUS: A SURVEY OF PATIENTS IN DIVERSE LOW-AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

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Option one

Background:

Despite available direct acting antivirals that cure hepatitis C virus (HCV) in eight-twelve weeks, high rates of infection persist (58 million globally) with low-and middle-income countries accounting for about 75% of the burden. To understand potential end users' preferences and attitudes towards a long-acting (LA) HCV treatment, a survey of people with, and at high risk of HCV, sought to explore the challenges and opportunities for three LA HCV treatment modalities, namely: injections (LAI), implants and microarray patches (MAPs).

Methods:

Using a descriptive cross-sectional survey, survey administrators in communities and health facilities that monitor and treat people with HCV recruited people who inject drugs (PWID) and people diagnosed with HCV through community outreach and convenience sampling, respectively, in India, Egypt and Ethiopia.

Results:

Between February-July 2023, 400 respondents (Egypt=100, Ethiopia=150, India= 150) were asked closed-ended questions about prior experience with the 3 LA modalities, and impressions regarding effectiveness, perceived risks and benefits, and willingness to use each of these if it worked just as well as taking pills/tablets. Most respondents reported having had HCV, of which 61% had received treatment, and 88% were cured.

Overall, 78% of respondents were willing to receive LA injections, and 55% and 43% were willing to receive MAPs and implants, respectively. In terms of benefits attributed to long-acting injections, respondents reported 'very beneficial' attributes of LAI as being easier than taking pills (63%), effectiveness (52%), fewer side effects (50%) and discretion (45%).

Conclusion:

Our survey showed high levels of enthusiasm for a single shot HCV LAI among people with, and at high risk of HCV, with the biggest benefit being ease, compared to taking pills. Together with decentralization of HCV point of care testing strategies, a single shot LAI that cures HCV would greatly speed up attainment of HCV elimination goals.