

HARM REDUCTION IN PEER-ASSISTED TELEMEDICINE FOR HEPATITIS C: SECONDARY OUTCOMES OF A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL.

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Background:

Hepatitis C (HCV) treatment for people who use drugs (PWUD) decreases injection drug use (IDU) and injection equipment sharing (IES) in both observational (D3FEAT and SYMPLIFY) and experimental (HERO) studies. The effect is unclear among rural PWUD, who face heightened barriers to harm reduction services. We examined changes in IDU and IES following HCV treatment in a randomized trial comparing peer-assisted telemedicine for HCV treatment (TeleHepC) versus peer-assisted usual care in rural PWUD. We hypothesize that TeleHepC increases harm reduction behaviors and peers facilitate this change.

Methods:

We used mixed-effects logistic regression to describe associations between harm reduction behaviors (IDU and IES) and randomized group, frequency of peer contact, HCV treatment initiation, HCV cure, and time. Follow up was done 12 and 36 weeks after HCV treatment completion or, in participants who never started treatment, 32 weeks post-randomization and 52 weeks post-randomization. To minimize inflation bias, we compared models including main effects plus interactions between exposure and time to models with main effects only, using a type-III likelihood ratio test, and only made further comparisons between groups at each timepoint if the test was significant.

Results:

IDU declined over time, more in TeleHCV participants (odds ratio (OR) of reported IDU by TeleHCV participants vs control at 12-week follow up = 0.42, 95% CI 0.20-0.87). IDU decreased with more peer interactions (OR of IDU among participants with third versus first quartile of peer contacts at 12-week follow up = 0.75, 95% CI 0.57-0.99). Similarly, IES decreased over time and was associated with peer interactions (OR of IES among participants with third versus first quartile of peer contacts at 36-week follow up=0.08, 95% CI 0.01-0.97).

Conclusion:

Peer-assisted telemedicine for HCV treatment decreases IDU and IES; peers contribute to this effect.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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