

Hepatitis C treatment uptake following hepatitis C point-of-care testing through a community-based mobile clinic: The Kombi Clinic

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Background: Increasing HCV testing is hampered by current diagnostic pathways requiring multiple visits and frequent loss to follow-up, amplified in key populations, such as people who inject drugs. This study evaluated treatment uptake following hepatitis C virus (HCV) point-of-care testing through a community-based mobile clinic in Queensland, Australia (the Kombi Clinic).

Methods: This observational study included people receiving point-of-care HCV testing through a community-led mobile clinic in Queensland, Australia. Kombi Clinic operates from a 1975 VW Kombi Van, with General Practitioners and a Nurse. Outreach clinics run at drop in centers, rough sleeping locations, community corrections and GP clinics. Participants received point-of-care HCV testing (Abbott Bioline HCV antibody testing and/or Xpert HCV Viral Load Fingerstick testing), linkage to nursing/physician care, and HCV treatment. The primary outcome was HCV treatment uptake in the three months following testing.

Results: Between 16 Feb 2022 and 27 Oct 2022, 372 people received HCV testing (29% female, median age, 42 years; 27% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; 40% injecting drug use in the previous six months, 22% receiving opioid agonist therapy). Overall, 142 people received HCV antibody testing and 229 received HCV RNA testing. Among those receiving HCV RNA testing, 88% had a valid test result on the first test (n=205) and 91% (n=208) had a valid test following an additional test. Overall, 18% (42/229) had detectable HCV RNA, with 74% (81/109) having had previously received HCV treatment. Overall, 64% (27/42) have initiated treatment.

Conclusions: Point-of-care HCV RNA testing provided through a community-based mobile clinic can achieve large numbers of people tested and treated. Further work is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of this intervention as a strategy to scale-up of HCV testing/treatment in the community to facilitate HCV elimination.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: GeneXpert machines and cartridges were provided through the National Australian Hepatitis C Point of Care Testing Program through funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Health, the National Health and Medical Research Council, Cepheid, Gilead Sciences, and AbbVie. JG is a consultant/advisor and has received research grants from AbbVie, Cepheid, Gilead, and Merck outside the submitted work. MY, JO & MO received research grants from AbbVie, Gilead, and Merck outside the submitted work.