

Demographic factors, knowledge, and experiences associated with engagement in care in Australians diagnosed with Hepatitis B

Tu T¹, Okeke S², Ajoyan H¹, Mozumder S¹, Vu M¹, Horwitz R², Cama E², George J¹, Brener L²

¹Storr Liver Centre, The Westmead Institute of Medical Research, University of Sydney and Westmead Hospital, Sydney, Australia, ²Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW, Sydney, Australia

Background: Hepatitis B is the leading risk factor for liver cancer globally and affects ~230,000 Australians. Despite awareness programs, the national rates of Hepatitis B engagement in care (26.0%) and treatment (12.7%) have remained below the national 2020 targets (50% and 20%, respectively). As engagement in care remains the largest gap, we aimed to understand the factors that affect amongst people diagnosed with Hepatitis B in Australia.

Methods: A survey was co-designed with people with lived experience and investigated demographics, Hepatitis B diagnosis, knowledge of Hepatitis B, current care and treatment, experiences of stigma and attitude towards current treatments. Participants were recruited through HepBcommunity.org, an online peer-led community support group of >2,300 members.

Results: We surveyed 248 participants residing in Australia diagnosed with Hepatitis B, ~40% of whom did not regularly engage in care. Variables associated with regular engagement in care included: higher income; shorter distance to general practitioner; residence in metropolitan areas; and diagnosis within a hospital or general practitioner setting (compared to sexual health clinic, community screening event, or health check centre). People who were not regularly engaged in care were more likely to have poorer hepatitis B knowledge. Contrary to expectations, experience of stigma in the community or in health care settings was similarly high regardless of engagement in care, with ~70% reporting experiencing stigma in these contexts “sometimes” or more frequently.

Conclusion: This research illustrates that HepBcommunity.org can be used to assess the needs and experiences of the affected community who are not linked to care, a key demographic for engagement and elimination efforts. We highlight specific factors that may be linked to engagement in care and could be used to specifically target these gaps with public health initiatives (including awareness campaigns and community support services).

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *This study was funded as an investigator sponsor research project by Gilead. Thomas Tu received consulting fees from GSK, Gilead, and Excision Biosciences; research funding from GESA, Gilead, and Excision Biosciences.*

Presenter Bio: A/Prof Thomas Tu is a molecular biologist at the Westmead Institute for Medical Research. He also lives with chronic Hepatitis B. He established the online support forum HepBCommunity.org and Hepatitis B Voices Australia, Australia's first advocacy group led by the HBV-affected community.