

## **Nurses' experiences implementing point of care Hepatitis C antibody and RNA testing for people who inject drugs in community settings**

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**Background:** Venepuncture for hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a key barrier to diagnosis and care for People Who Inject Drugs (PWID). QuickStart is a randomised controlled trial of nurse-led care using HCV Point of Care (POC) tests to improve HCV diagnosis and treatment rates among PWID in community settings. We review nurses' experiences implementing HCV POC Antibody (OraSure®) and RNA (GeneXpert®) tests in community settings and describe benefits and challenges to their use. (NCT05016609, clinicaltrials.gov)

**Analysis:** Nurses' experiences when engaging PWID for POC HCV testing can provide valuable "coal face" information about POC test administration and levels of acceptability by PWID. We present key learnings from the implementation phase of the QuickStart study after recruitment of the first 200 participants.

**Outcomes:** A positive POC antibody test was a useful visual aid that assisted with progression to venepuncture. Participants were willing to wait 20 minutes for POC antibody results, however most declined waiting 60 minutes for POC RNA results, limiting the ability to deliver results 'at the point of care'. Some POC RNA tests resulted in test errors. Re-testing on the same day was rarely achieved due to difficulty making contact or participant choice. Calloused hands and cold weather contributed to difficulty performing fingerstick sampling. Nurses were able to provide valuable HCV education and dispel misconceptions about HCV antibody and infection status when implementing POC tests.

**Conclusions:** Nurses found HCV POC testing to be a valuable engagement tool. PWID showed willingness to have venepuncture to confirm HCV status after POC testing. Health and harm reduction messaging and treatment pathways were discussed while awaiting POC results. While HCV POC antibody and RNA testing provide opportunities to improve HCV detection rates some challenges remain including time to result, difficulties making contact for repeat testing and overcoming challenges of cold or calloused hands.

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